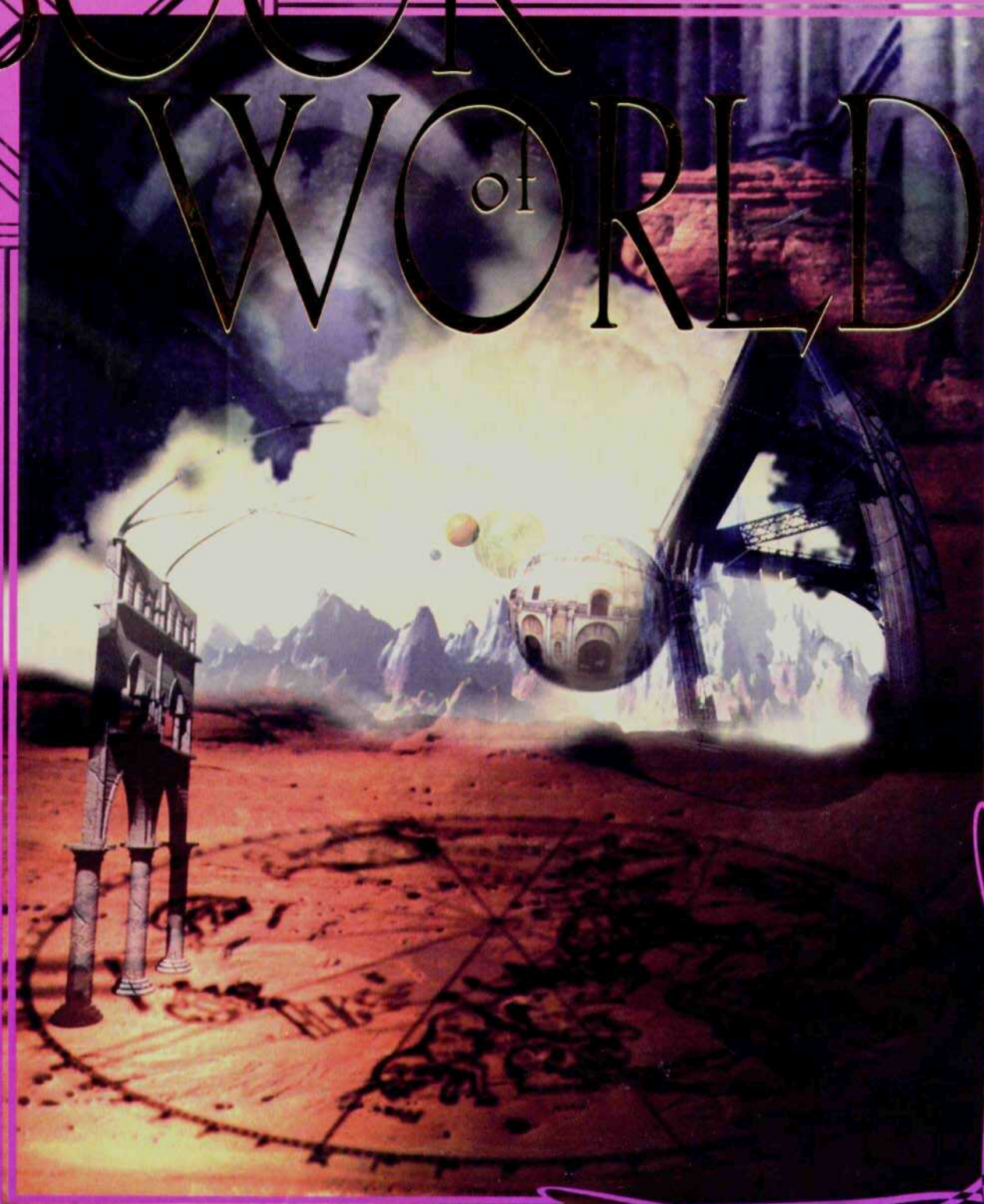


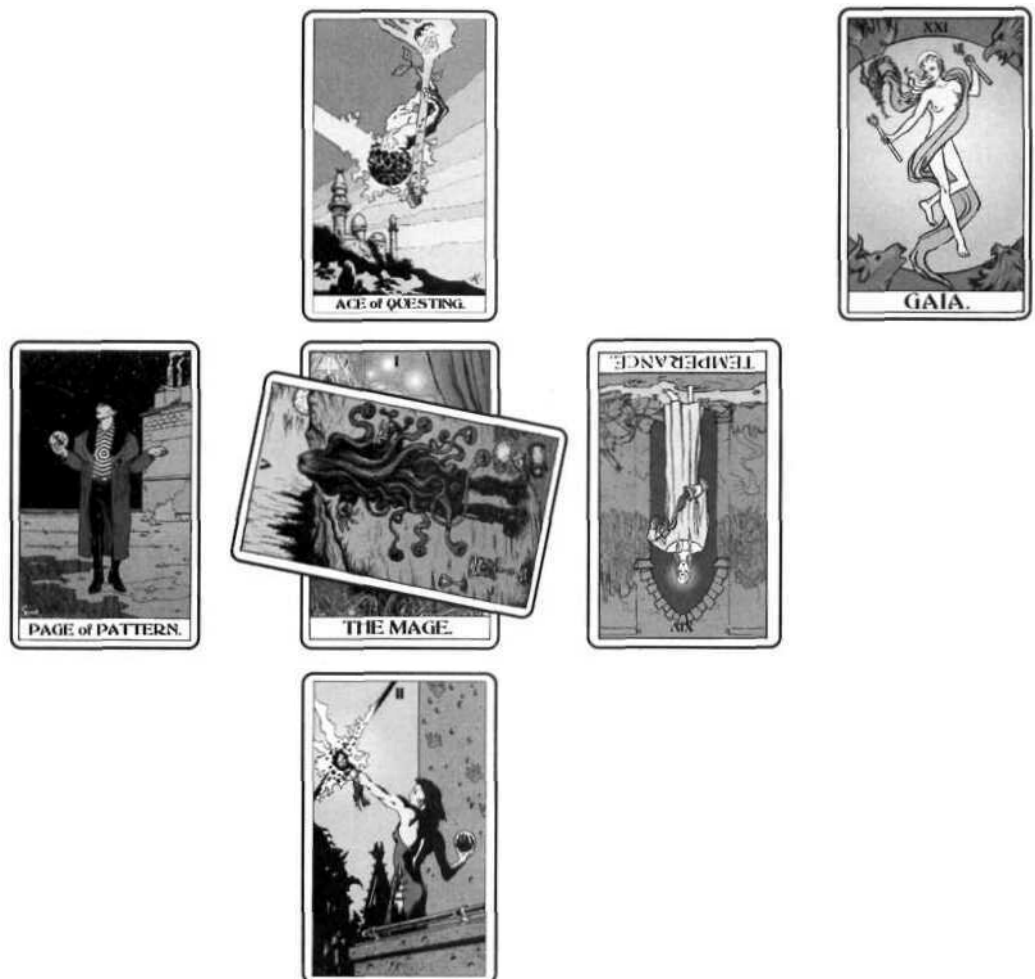
BEYOND THE BARRIERS:

the BOOK of WORLDS™



The Otherworlds Sourcebook for Mage: The Ascension®

BEYOND THE BARRIERS:
the
BOOK
of
WORLDS



And all embraced in skylight
Or wreathed in fatal shade...

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Beyond the Barriers: The Book of Worlds

BEYOND THE BARRIERS: the BOOK of WORLDS

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Prelude

By Kathleen Ryan

Deep in the Umbra, somewhere between the Horizon Realm Shangri-La and Piuto's second moon Cerberus, Amanda walks. In her hands is a silver cord, strong and light, stretching behind and before her for as far as she can see. The minutes pass into hours, but she follows it patiently, knowing that at the end of the walk is home, knowing that her friends keep the path secure for her.

The thread snaps.

Quick as thought, the shield magicks drop, and Amanda falls free in the void.

In the first startled second, the vacuum catches at her breath, and the only air in a million miles escapes her. The water in her breath freezes before her eyes.

Blood spurts from her ears as the drums rupture, and then the silence steals even her heartbeat. More slowly, her skin burns, reddens, bruises blue, the capillaries bursting into space. She fights nausea and loses, retching and kicking, her hair floating forward into the mess. Gasping, she curls up, eyes shut, knuckles clenched white around the useless, broken cord.

She starts to drown.

At the edge of panic, the young mage ransacks her mind and memory, hunting anything, everything she has ever known, heard or thought about breathing the Ether. Frantically she builds a wall of logic, a chain of reason to bind her lungs to her bidding — and chokes on nothing. She commands, shouting to herself (and her terrified

Avatar) *believe or die!* But desperation is no substitute for faith, and her chest is empty still, smoldering fire. Near the end, near unconsciousness, as the flame in her lungs flares into her brain, Amanda screams in silent, throat-tearing rage, maddened that the universe should dare disobey her.

It will be as I want it, she thinks more calmly, and laughs, breathing easily.

Now she straightens, turning slightly clockwise and end-over-end, drifting in a gentle wind. Her Avatar manifests before her. The bloody-handed angel is trembling, wings wrapped protectively around herself. Only her little-girl face shows, terrified and pale.

We're safe? The angel asks, hesitantly.

We're dead.

Reeling in the useless thread, the mortal half of the mage studies the endless sky, but sees no planets, no Realms, no movement. The sun's disc is very small; she knows that the Horizon must be too far away to run to or signal.

But we breathe. We live.

Amanda swings her bag around, sending her body spinning in the opposite direction. She stops it against her knees, slowing the spin, and finds her face next to the spirit's feet.

We're still dying, she says plainly. *You and the rest of my soul are going to disintegrate in about six hours.*

She opens her bag just enough for one hand to enter, fumbles through the floating contents. A rubber band ties back her hair, a wrinkled handkerchief mops up her ears and face, a few packets of crackers go into her back pocket on a whim — Amanda almost smiles at the thought of this last meal.

The letter she was to deliver to Senex is still there. She moves it carefully to a zippered panel of her jacket, in the hopes that her body will be easier to find than her bag.

Won't the others come looking for us? The angel asks, pleadingly.

Maybe. If they know the thread's been cut. If it wasn't cut because Cerberus is under attack. If we don't drift so far that even the Old Man can't find us.

At last she finds what she wants: an old pair of opera glasses wrapped in a spare shirt.

What do we do? The angel is close to tears, now.

Stuffing the shirt back into the duffel, the mortal's hand grazes the hilt of one of her spare knives, an ancient bowie with a razor-sharp blade — a present from the Old Man. Amanda grasps it tightly, longing for the safety of her mentor's study on Cerberus, and pulls it free of the bag. She straps the knife around her waist, double-checking the thin loop of leather holding it in its sheath,

knowing that she will have to kill herself — to free her Avatar before the six hours are up — if the angel is to survive. Once more she looks to the sun, wondering where and when the Old Man will come looking for the angel again, what kind of body might hold her. She turns back and finds the Avatar's eyes on the knife, but the bloody-handed angel says nothing.

We watch, and wait, and try to arrange a signal. Amanda shuts the bag, slings it, and settles back, scanning patiently for any sign of life.

There, Amanda says, pointing to a patch of blackness near the angel's right foot. *Sunward, coming closer.*

She rotates once more around, easing her free hand forward, her left leg out and back, killing her momentum. The tiny gray pinpoint becomes a tiny gray cloud, then faint specks of light in a tight formation.

The Avatar drifts forward, wings barely moving. Her face is still troubled. *What is it?* she asks.

Doesn't matter. We've only got three hours left, It moves so slowly.

That's an illusion. It's moving so fast it won't see us as it goes by — assuming it has eyes and comes anywhere near us.

How are we going to signal it?

Amanda looks her soul up and down, then extends an open hand.

Come closer, and I'll show you.

The angel smiles weakly, drifts back to her mage, and puts her delicate, ivory-white and crimson fingers in Amanda's callused fist. Without a word, the Euthanatos yanks on the spirit's outstretched arm, pulling her in, flattening her sideways, slamming into the folded wings and twisting the arm up and behind, past the point of pain, near breaking. The Avatar shrieks, and the sound fills space and echoes in Amanda's silent skull. As the angel screams, the faint light of her explodes in an eye-shattering nova, and the mortal lets go in agony.

Even before she can see again, Amanda's thoughts are on the glasses, and her left hand snatches them to her face while the right is still twitching with pain. The pinpoint stars have scattered; some are missing, but the half-dozen remaining are speeding straight for the fading light.

It worked. Amanda glances over to her wounded Avatar, pats the angel's hair gently. *It's all right now.*

The angel begins to cry.

Amanda raises the opera glasses again. The little moving stars slowly show discs, clarify into six pairs of glowing yellow eyes, bright but still very small and distant. The first pair come close enough to show a body behind them, and Amanda flinches as the tiny skull

attached to those eyes drops out of focus and bumps its nose into her ring lens.

Too surprised to keep hold of the glasses, she lets them drift out of her reach, studying the newcomers — six or seven mouse-shaped skeletons with intense golden lights for eyes. They scurry around Amanda and the angel, running steady on a plane she cannot see.

The young mage digs into her pocket for the crackers, black and blue fingers clumsy on the cellophane. She hands a few to the angel,

See if they like these, she says, and begins to throw odds and ends from her bag. Pens, keys and knives spin out in all directions as she maneuvers herself parallel to the mice. They fidget around her, nibbling at her hair and jacket, crawling into her pockets whenever her spin brings them above the spirits' "floor." Finally she stops turning. With her head and shoulders securely above the ground, she wills herself to grab hold of it, and pulls herself up as easily as out of a swimming pool,

For the first time, she sees that the void around them is not empty — along the mice's course there is a trail, a faint gray line in a dusty black plain. She turns to her Avatar, realizes that her soul has been standing on this plane all along.

Now the mice have swarmed up the angel. Her wings are open, and though her cheeks are still wet, the tears have stopped. Two bony noses peek out from her hair, one mouse perches on her right wing, three on her left, and in her good left hand the last two are munching on saltines, the crumbs falling through their empty ribs. She bites her lip and frowns.

Amanda, guiltily unwrapping another pack of crackers, leans forward to try to soothe her. The mice duck their heads in and hide from her, running to the other side of her Avatar, huddling in the hollow of the wings.

I want to go home, the angel whimpers, and begins to cry again.

The mice perk up their heads as she speaks, and twitch nervously in the shadow, eyes dancing. A moment later, they stream out in single-file, and the last in line lifts its tail to the angel, beckoning with its forepaw for her to take it. Fearfully, she reaches forward — Amanda catches her other hand only just in time — and the mice race off with the angel and her mage crawling along behind them, faster than sound.

The sun is only a pinpoint itself when the mice stop, but Pluto and Cerberus are nowhere in sight. The line breaks up as the spirits confer, skulls shaking nervously around their leader, and in great agitation they run — first under the Avatar's wings, then behind Amanda's boots, then darting back along the trail sunward.

What the hell? Amanda curses, checking her watch.

There is only one hour left, and she reaches slowly and bitterly for the old Bowie knife,

Wait. A voice — two voices? — echoes in her head.

The young mage looks up in confusion to the angel (collapsed in a feathery heap before her), then past the pale spirit to a darkness storming up the path, swallowing the stars behind it.

The darkness comes closer, and faintly now Amanda sees the rider: Mitzi Zimmerman, the Old Man's second-in-command. She guides her huge steed with a simple rope halter, brings it to a standstill in front of them, and still the horse is darkness, solid and graceful, eyeless and eerily undefined.

Nice to find you alive, Amanda. I thought I was looking for a corpse.

Mitzi dismounts, unties the halter. The darkness dissipates, and black saddlebags fall to the ground.

Do you still have the thread with you?

Amanda reaches into her bag, pulls it out for the older woman to see. Mitzi takes it and examines it carefully, end to end, and tosses it over her shoulder, where it disappears.

All right. This is how it is. She pulls a small glass jar from her pocket, hands it to Amanda. *Put a little of this in each ear, and rub it on all the skin you can get to now. You can do a more thorough job later, when you have time.*

Amanda obeys, and Mitzi continues aloud in her quiet, firm voice, "You can't go back to Cerberus now. This thread was cut from there, and either we have to clean house or the Hermetic refugees do. I'm hoping it's a just misguided assassination attempt, and not something more serious, but... there it is. Someone back home is out to get you.

"While I'm thinking about it, do you have the letter from Scherer?" She accepts it, throws it over her other shoulder, and goes on.

"The plan is, you go back to the alchemist's shop, keep quiet, and we'll call for you in about a week, I've brought enough clothes and things to get you by for that long — I really am so pleased you survived! — and Scherer's apprentice can help you with anything I've forgotten."

"I don't think they're going to want me back."

"Why not?" Mitzi hands Amanda the saddlebags, and starts twisting the rope into a different pattern.

"I killed a man in Scherer's workshop."

"Oh. Shit... Who was it?"

"Richard Somnitz." She pauses, remembering. "Of the House of Helekar, they said."

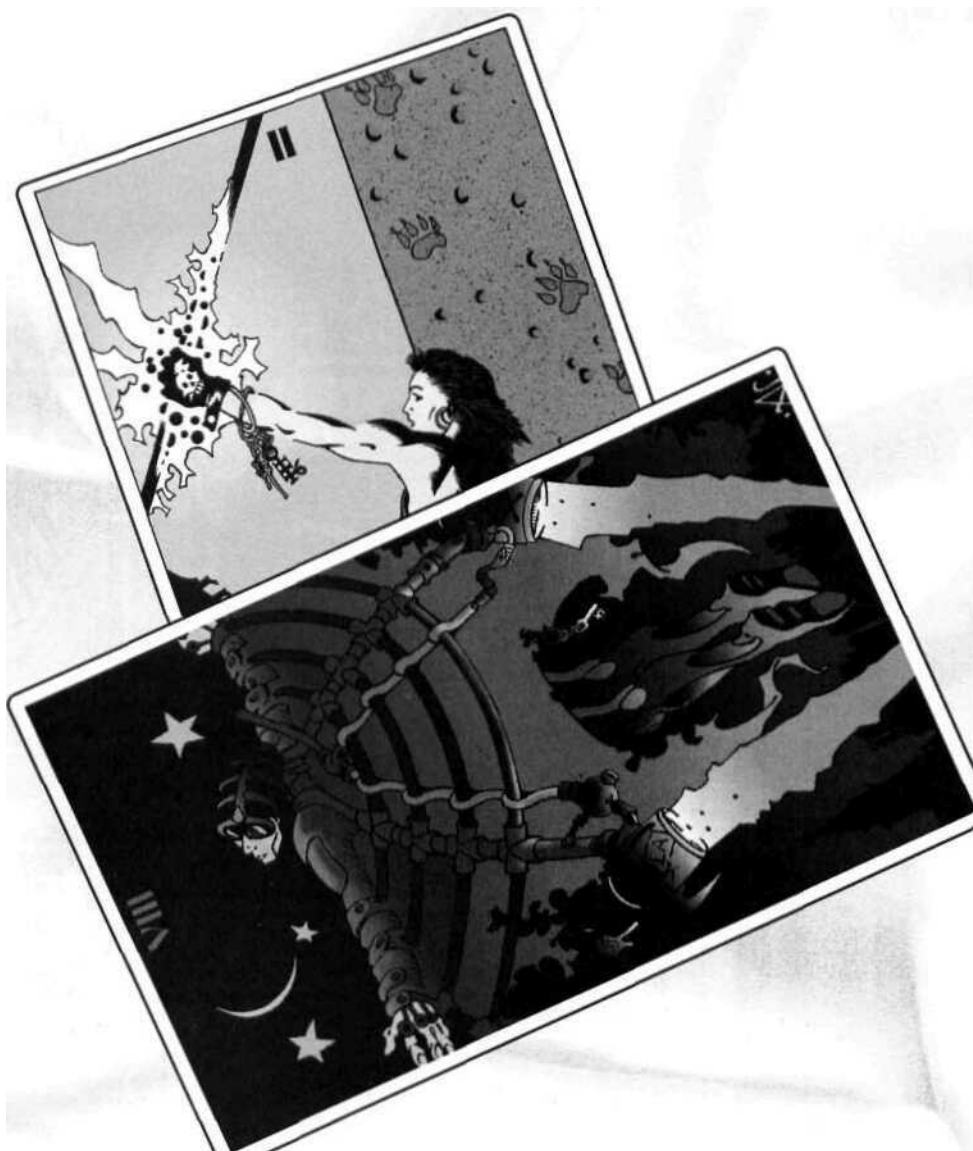
"Damnation. All right. New plan."

Mitzi takes a deep breath, thinks a moment. "Go to the Steel Horse — it's the bar next to the machine shop on the corner of Jade Lane and Nine Sun Ghost Street. Don't ask your way there. Tell the bartender that the Yama Kings sent you, and you want a room. Lay low. Change your name, your clothes, your hair color, your eye color, your walk, your talk, perfume, soap — everything. You know better than I do."

She loops the rope out into space, and it settles down onto the necks of two dark horses, the loose ends lying lightly on the seat of a small black cart. Mitzi mounts, Amanda follows, and the angel drifts back into place.

"We'll pick you up as soon as we can. But... if the House is after you, and Gericault too, don't be afraid to run," She clicks to the horses and flicks the harness.

"You have all the universe to hide in," she says, and the cart rolls on.





Introductions All Around

You wish to see the distant realms? Very well. But know this first: The places you will visit, the places you will see, do not exist. For there are only two worlds — your world, which is the real world, and other worlds, the fantasy.

Worlds like this are worlds of the human imagination: Their reality, or lack of reality, is not important. What is important is that they are there. These worlds provide an alternate. Provide an escape. Provide a threat. Provide a dream, and power, provide refuge, and pain. They give your world meaning. They do not exist, and thus they are all that matters.

- The Faerie Queen, *The Books of Magic* (Neil Gaiman)

Alexis Hastings

Greetings and good day, fellow travelers! Alexis Hastings at your service. This is so much fun — I've never gotten to be a tourguide before. Anyway, without further ado, let me tell you all about myself: To make a long story short, I'm a Son of Ether, strange as it sounds. I could be an Ether Kid, if you prefer. I travel through as much of reality as I can find, exploring, researching, and finding new ways to use electricity. But I digress.

We're all here today to take a wild and wonderful tour of the Otherworlds. Much as I would like to be an expert on them all, I'm afraid I am not. So, it's my pleasure to let you know that later in the book we'll be bringing along the

greatest experts that we've been able to find to tell you all about their pet places. I'd like to thank Porthos Fitz-Empress for giving us this extraordinary opportunity to publish this guide, and my good friend the wild and wacky Fisher Princess. Don't mind her if she seems a bit... guarded. She's not quite as enthralled with the concept of this guide as Porthos and I are. But never mind, I'm sure she'll warm to her topic. How can she not? While not an expert on the whole of the Otherworlds, I am an incurable explorer and sometime hopeless romantic, well qualified to give you the basics of what you can expect when traveling to these strange new realms.

Before You Go: The Structure of the Otherworlds

I suppose starting with a discussion of what the Otherworlds are and how they are arranged would be best. You've probably heard most of it before, but I fear I would be remiss in not including it, just in case you hadn't.

A hit of a caveat, though: the Otherworlds defy conventional mapping. I suppose the Void Engineers are working on it, but even they have failed, and a good thing it is, too. Part of the fun and fascination of these places are that they *are* unknown, and probably ultimately unknowable, because they change with every traveler's perception. Any cosmology I give you is at best misleading, being based on my own perceptions.

First Awareness

Having said that, mages and our lupine cousins, the Garou, have identified a certain structure to the Otherworlds. The first part of that structure you will have to be familiar with is the Periphery. This state of perception provides our first contact with the Otherworlds, even before we are Awakened. Brief instances of absolute certainty, feelings of danger, a tiny bit of precognition — all signs of the Periphery brushing your subconscious. The Periphery does not limit itself to the Awakened. People with what some of us call an "Awareness Talent" can sense the world on this level. For the most part, though, brief flashes, and trips into the Dream Realms are the only touches of the Spirit World most mortals will ever know.

Once you can feel the Periphery, you're ready to try to cross the Gauntlet. This first barrier separates our physical reality from the wondrous Otherworlds. The Gauntlet is much stronger now than it was in the mythic past, bolstered as it has been by the works of the Technocracy. They scored a major victory when humanity lost its belief in the spiritual and its sense of wonder and began believing in only what could be seen and touched. The Sleepers are only now beginning to appreciate the true effects of their abandonment of spirituality, and they've begun to rebel. This outrage may be our greatest defense against the stagnation of the Technocracy.

The Penumbra, Videre, Resonance and Domains

After you successfully pass through the Gauntlet, you enter the Near Umbra, which is made up of several parts. The Penumbra provides a spiritual reflection of the reality of the physical world, bathed in the twilight of the Moon. Depending on your orientation, you might see this reflection from one of three perspectives. Mages have identified

three different ways of viewing the Penumbra, which the Hermetics have labeled "Videre," and these color the way a traveler sees the world she's just left. These Videre allow you to see strong concentrations of the Resonance effect — the traces left by something's nature or history — sometimes as colored auras, sometimes as archetypal images.

People with a strong faculty for abstract reasoning — that is, we mages — see the physical world as a matrix of patterns and auras, called the Astral Videre, pulsating with Quintessence and shimmering with energy. If you go in through astral travel (like a Mind Adept, or some vampires) or technomagick, or simply see things through the proverbial "clinical eye," your mind fills with visions of sparkling energy and a clarity of sight you've likely never experienced before. This clarity allows you to see things as you imagine them to be. For instance, if you happen to be a crusader for right and justice, you'd probably see a statue of Lady Justice as a bright light, casting out rays of hope and righteousness. If, on the other hand, you believe the law is corrupt and serves only criminals, you would probably see the statue crackling with dark energy and a malevolent glare. The so-called "auras" you've probably heard of carry a Resonance impression, and literally color a person or place unless steps have been taken to conceal them. The final vision, however, comes from what you bring with you.

Beings with a primal affinity — shapechangers, and a few of our more Primordial Traditions and Essences — who visit through Spirit magick see the world through the Videre Spiritus, a wash of vivid sensory impressions. Bright colors, sharp scents and an all-encompassing feeling of oneness greet these visitors, who sometimes feel more at home in the Penumbra than in the material world. The patterns are there, but they look like webs and meshes, skittering with spider-spirits and ghosted over with grinning Umbrood. Brrrr! The Resonance in an item or location is really apparent with this insight, and things are a lot less subjective. You see what is, rather than what you *think* is. If that same statue of Lady Justice was used as a meeting place for local Nephandi, you would most likely see cracks forming in it and the marble discoloring. You get the idea.

The ultimate chill, though, is the view reserved for the dying and the dead who pass over: the Videre Mortem. Not that I've seen this myself, mind you, but I'm told these sad folks see the world in perpetual decay — the mirror's cracked, as it were. It's said that some of the dead and dying may see a tunnel through the Penumbra, with a heaven or hell at the other end, but most of the people I've asked simply see the world through a dirtier glass. Some especially powerful concentrations of life here energy blaze like bonfires, but other than that, it's a Hollow One's hit parade (no offense intended, guys!).

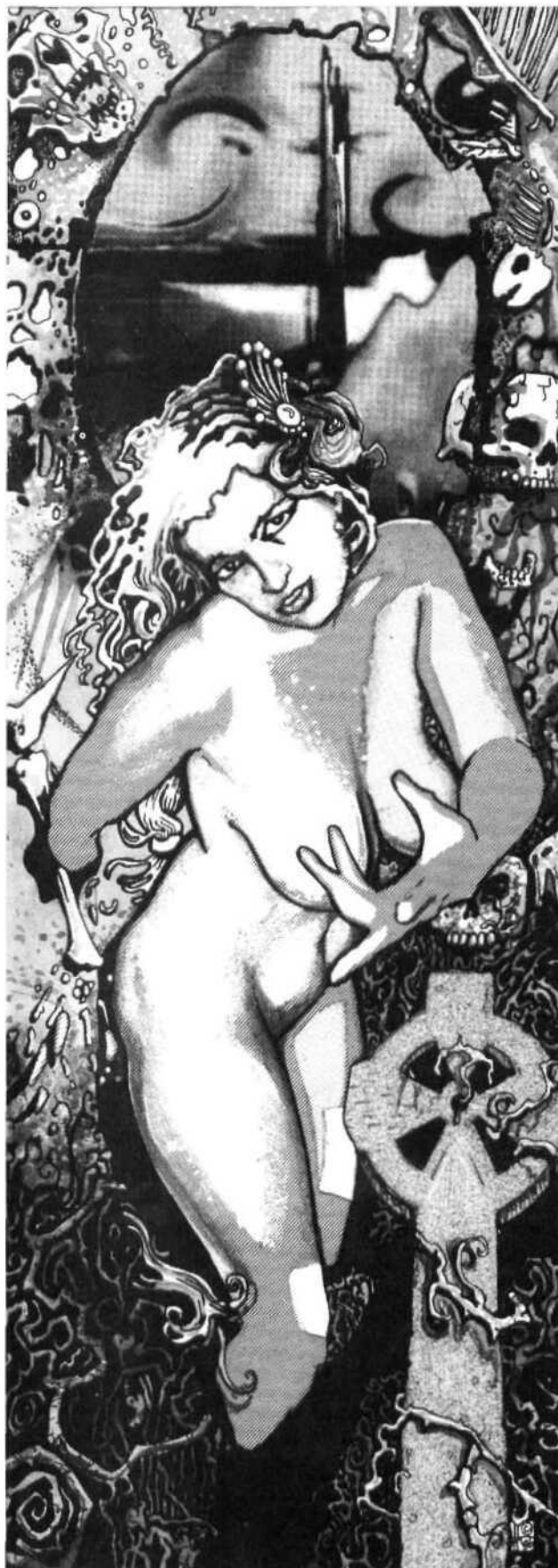
Some places — notably those which produce or retain Quintessence flows — attain a slightly different nature in the Penumbra. No matter which Videre you prefer, the essence of

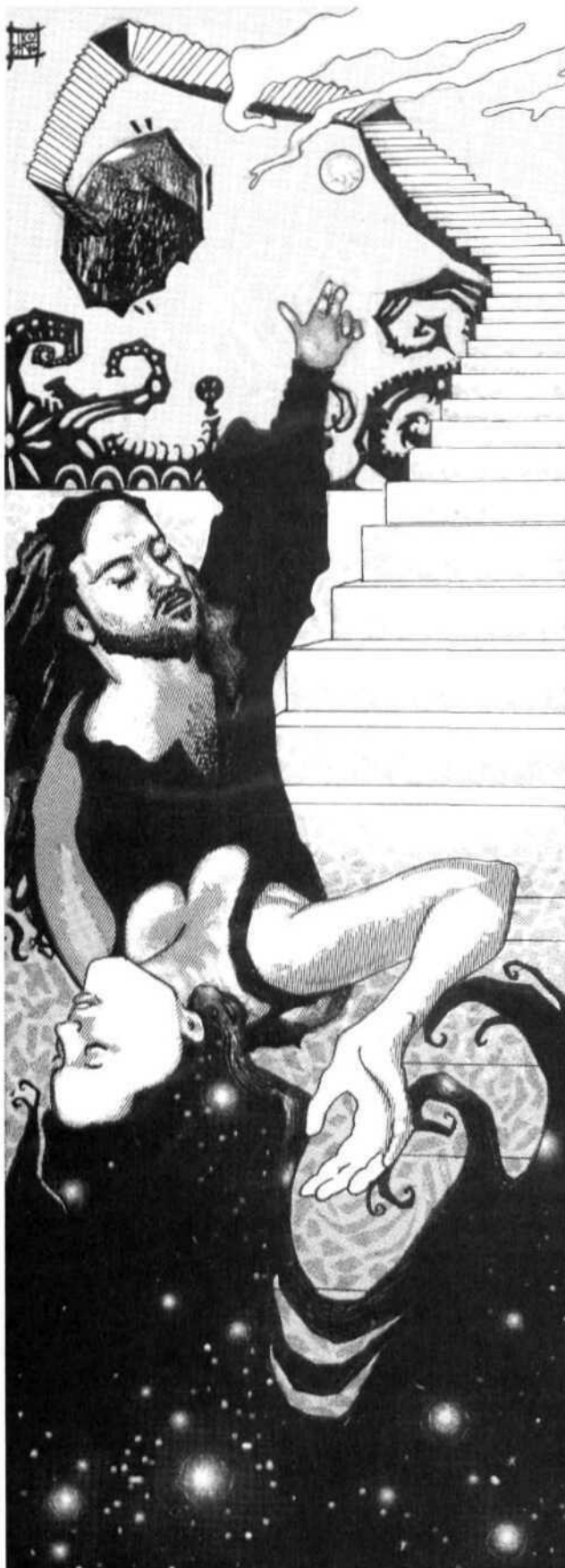
these locations saturates all three "levels." Most authorities call such places Domains, and their Resonance makes them what they are. Toxic-waste dumps, crack houses, and other similar places reflect their true natures, and become more horrid than they are in physical reality, housing mad and twisted spirits. These types of places are culled blights. The great cosmic balancing act also provides us with the opposite, places called glens. These places of light and virtue, whether they be virgin forests or urban safehouses for abused children, carry a positive Resonance instead of a poisonous one. Domains are not fixed places, but fluid, changing areas; one can either shrink or grow, expanding and contracting its borders, depending on what happens in its corresponding area in physical reality. Many of our Spirit Masters claim that the number of glens is shrinking at an alarming rate. Pleasant thought.

The Three Worlds

The adventurous traveler will also find three Worlds in the Near Umbra, layers of sediment floating in the great cosmic test tube. These are the High Umbra, the Middle Umbra, and the Low Umbra. Look, I know the terms aren't terribly descriptive, but bear with me here, okay? The High Umbra is the realm of ideas. Creativity, imagination, love, justice, peace, hatred, and just about any other cerebral or abstract concepts you can think of are found here. Most mages favor the High Umbra over, and sometimes to the exclusion of, all others. I will admit, I love the place. Creativity, imagination, and wonder are the keys to good Science and, in my humble opinion, the keys to Ascension. However, just because the High Umbra embodies these ideals doesn't make it the be-all and end-all. Many mages who refuse to acknowledge the value of the other areas of the Umbra make prime candidates for falling victim to their own pride.

The Middle Umbra presents wonder just as surely as the High Umbra does. Perhaps I can describe it best as the spiritual embodiment of the cerebral concepts of the High Umbra. (I like that. I think I'll use it.) Some say that the Middle Umbra is the spirit of Nature. And in some places, that couldn't be more accurate. But in others, it couldn't be farther from the truth. There are places in the Middle Umbra that have little to do with nature beyond humanity's abuse of it. Generally, though, the Middle Umbra is a nitty place. You can find anything you can dream of here. The werewolves tend to consider it their personal playground, however, so be careful. The fuzzies certainly know more about it than anyone else, so they may be right. Of course, some Traditions believe our Avatars give us just as much of a right to be there as the Garou. Regardless of "rights," the Garou really are the experts on the Middle Umbra. Supposedly, some Realms exist in the Middle Umbra that are too naturalistic even for the Dreamspeakers to reach, and some too alien for any human to reach. Naturally, Senator, I can neither confirm nor deny these rumors, but it wouldn't surprise me. Our wolfish friends say that there are at least 13





realms here, plus a smattering of other places that they won't talk about, though some have surmised that they have to do with the ancestral spirits of the Garou tribes.

I don't advocate exploring the Low Umbra. Fascinating as I'm sure it would be, it scares me. Death and decay make their homes there. If you can talk to a ghost long enough, I'm sure you could find out a good deal about it. Most mages never venture into the Low Umbra, and few of those who do return to tell about it. If you have an insatiable thirst for knowledge, talk to a Euthanatos or a Dreamspeaker (see Chapter Three, if you're brave). They were my source for information, and would be your best bets for any real knowledge. The Nephandi are the only others I'm fairly sure deal with the Low Umbra on a regular basis, and you'd better not ask them,

Zones

Besides the Penumbra and the Worlds, a number of **Zones** float about the Near Umbra. They weave their way in, around, and through everything else, bobbing about like bubbles in carbonated water. Some of them are lots of fun, and some of them are truly frightening reminders of the powers we play with and the truths we have yet to learn.

No one understands the Zones; they defy all attempts to measure, define or categorize them in anything but the most basic ways. The Digital Web, the Maya Dream Realms, the Mirror Zone and possibly others we haven't found yet criss-cross the Worlds' layers. From what I've seen, they often take on the "tone" of the "layer" they're crossing into (look, I said this wasn't an exact science. Bear with me). If you entered a pleasant Dream Realm in the High Umbra, for instance, it might shift beneath you and end up in the Low Umbra "sector." Boom. Instant nightmare. Some places, I'm told, never shift out of place, or do so only rarely, if that's true, there are some sectors of the Web that are best avoided.

The Horizon and Beyond

Beyond the Near Umbra lies the **Horizon**, yet another barrier in our endless quest for discovery. This one exists to separate the Realms of the Near Umbra from the fluid reality of the **Deep Umbra** and possibly to keep out such dark forces as the masters of the Nephandi. Of course, the Horizon is much more than a barrier, so it gives us something to explore in itself. Perhaps you've heard of Umbral Chantries (a.k.a. Horizon Realms), or maybe even have one yourself. Well, Umbral Chantries nestle here, in the Horizon, and mages are not the only ones who create them. Powerful spirits have their own Umbral "Chantries," and Nephandi and Marauders always hover about hoping for easy access to our world.

One more feature of the Horizon to point out—the **Shade Realms**. These Near Umbral reflections of the **Shard Realms** that can be found in the Deep Umbra serve as doorways to the Shard Realms themselves. At least, some of them do. And to find out what *that* means, you'll just have to keep reading.

There is one place where I would be ostracized for life if I didn't mention. And we can't have that, because I already have my *Paradigma* articles written for the next year. That, of course, would be Etherspace. Did you hear that? Let's try it again, (Deep, resonating echo effect) Etherspace space space space. Ah, yes. The playground of my Tradition. Electricity and Ether, what a combination! I'm very thankful for Etherspace, myself. If the Technocracy hadn't decided to declare Ether nonexistent, it would have taken much longer for us to leave them, and then I might not be here hosting this travel guide for you. That would truly be a shame. Now, the rest of the Traditions know Etherspace as the Deep Umbra and the Technocrats prefer The Void. Kinda boring, I think, "Etherspace" has a much more exciting ring to it.

The Deep Umbra is rather a mystery, I love mysteries, don't you? Even in all of our legendary pride, I think we'd be hard-pressed to find a mage arrogant enough to actually claim to know and understand the Deep Umbra. The rumors about what's out here pale in comparison to the truth. Twisted spirits, abominations so bent we can't comprehend them, the Labyrinths of the Nephandi, perhaps even their masters — all things that are said to be out here.

Not to discourage you though; the Deep Umbra does have some really interesting places. The above-mentioned Shard Realms, for instance. Supposedly pieces of the original Creation, some claim that they correspond to the other nine planets (including the Moon, of course), and the nine Spheres of Magick. Other strange Realms float around out here too, like Paradox Realms (where you go when consensual reality sends you to your room for being a naughty little mage) and Umbrood Realms (which you can probably guess by the name), created by powerful Umbrood spirits. I can't tell you too much about those, so I'll just let you hear it from our esteemed panel of experts a little later on.

Those Stuck Within the Mud

Speaking of the Technocracy, they don't agree with us much on the Umbra, not that this should come as much of a surprise. When do they *ever* agree with us much? According to the Technocracy, the Umbra must not be allowed to interact with physical reality. They claim its "alternate dimensions" contain threats too powerful to control, yet too compelling to ignore. They post Void Engineers at the Horizon to prevent anyone from crossing, all the while putting their own people in the Deep Umbra to explore it and close it off to anyone they don't think should know about it. Imagine! Trying to cut us off from Etherspace after claiming it didn't exist. It's an outrage, really.

Technocrats want Horatio to be able to tell Hamlet he's wrong. Everything in Earth has been dreamt of (and processed, approved, and catalogued) in their philosophy, and there's no Heaven to worry about. (Sorry, Will, but I couldn't resist.) I suppose in their way most of them think

they're doing the right thing. And in some cases, they even have a point. After all, they dislike the Nephandi and the Marauders at least as much as we do. Nonetheless, the inherent flaw in their theory is seeing everything that doesn't conform to their world view as "supernatural," or at least "deviant." Personally, I think I am quite natural, and wouldn't consider myself much of a deviant (my friends are another story). And if our Avatars really are shards of an ancient One, I wouldn't call them "supernatural."

Technocrats, as well as many Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts, see the Otherworlds as nothing more exotic than other dimensions (exotic enough, I'd say!), populated by aliens coming to invade the Earth, I suppose the concept of alternate dimensions has gained enough credence among the Sleepers to be a legitimate explanation for them. Alternate dimensions could perhaps be explained scientifically and alien life isn't necessarily impossible. Myself, I don't see that it makes much difference. Think of them as alternate dimensions, if you'd like. It's an accurate enough description; there are certainly spirits out there that would like to take over, and if you want to look at it right, you are entering another dimension of reality. Call me a radical. I don't think science and spirit are mutually exclusive.

Basically, the Otherworlds are what you make of them. I have never heard any two explorers agree on the details of the Umbra. As far as I can tell, you see what you expect to see there. That is one of the unfortunate side effects of this guide; by explaining these places, we'll be coloring your views on what you'll see. Instead of going there and experiencing your own perceptions, you're probably going to experience your understanding of our perceptions. Don't think about it too much unless you're willing to get a headache. Just try to keep in mind, when you travel to the Umbra, that each time you go is a highly personal experience. Keep an open mind, and don't worry if you don't see too much of what is described here. Let your own vision and your own creativity take hold, and lead you where they will. Life would get awfully boring if we all saw the same thing — we wouldn't be able to have such wonderful philosophical discussions. Which brings us to the philosophy of the Otherworlds:

Do we make the Shadow worlds? Or are they independent of us, awaiting our footfalls? Or is there an unfairly excluded middle? Is it a matter of more or less, rather than either-or?

— Roger Zelazny, *The Courts of Chaos*

What a great quote, and how true it is! Debates rage about whether the Umbra takes its form from the physical world, or the physical from the Umbra, or whether the two really have much to do with each other at all, outside of the Penumbra, Are Realms waiting there to be discovered, or does humanity create them with its collective unconscious? Is the Umbra just a reflection of what happens in the physical world, or does what happens in the Umbra also affect the physical world? I suspect that like most things, the

truth lies somewhere in the middle. I certainly don't know the answers. But keep the questions in mind. Maybe you can be the traveler to come up with a breakthrough on this one.

That concludes our cosmology section. I hope you found it interesting, or at least useful. I couldn't very well send you off into our guest-stars' discussions of their favorite Realms without giving you some idea of where these places are.

Travel

Not so fast. You can't get rid of me that easily. If you are going to traipse about the Umbra, you need to know what to expect. I think we ought to get down to the nitty-gritty of what you might actually find once you get to the Umbra, not to mention how you get there in the first place.

Getting There

Flights leave daily for Horizon and selected destinations from all major cities, courtesy of Etherways Express. Contact your nearest Chantry for information on schedules, fares, and all-inclusive vacation packages....

I'm afraid not, though it's an interesting concept. Perhaps a travel agency devoted exclusively to the service of mages.... Sorry, I get a bit distracted sometimes. Anyway, there are a few different ways you can wake up one day and find yourself touring the Otherworlds.

The first and, if you have access to the proper places, easiest is to find a portal or gateway to the Horizon. Most Chantries with an Umbral component will have access to the Horizon. Of course, many of them don't have any way out of the Horizon to *anywhere else*, but that's a problem for another time. If you really want to explore the Umbra, you'll probably have to do it by more difficult means.

First, if you happen to be extraordinarily talented with Mind magick, you might be able to send your mind spinning out of your body into the wild blue yonder. Also known as astrally projecting, this power allows you to float about, disembodied, through the Umbra. If you can do it, I'm sure you can imagine the difficulties and the advantages. Now, I prefer to go physically when I can manage it. This does require a reasonable understanding of Spirit magick, though. (Incidentally, I'm told the Void Engineers have their own version of the Spirit Arts which they call Dimensional Science.) Sad to say, I can't do it myself yet. So, I do what many of us do — make really good friends with someone who's really talented with Spirit. Some of my best friends are Spirit masters — Job Lightfoot, Euthanatos, Spirit Master, good friend and cabal member, for example — and I love them all. If you can't get there yourself, this is the next best thing. Besides, trips are always more fun (and safer) with a friend. Failing all of those, if you're really lucky or really good, you might be able to find or, um, "liberate" (not steal, not at all) a Talisman or other Device that provides you passage into the Otherworlds.

Once You Arrive

Now that you've gotten there, and you're reading this by the bright moonlight, you need to know how to get around. It's really just a matter of thinking of where you want to be and then going. Of course, your life will be much easier if you or someone in your group knows where you're going and has been there before. Strictly speaking, it's not necessary, just easier. It is essential that if you don't know where you're going you at least understand the general layout of the Otherworlds. Go to your local Chantry and sign up for a cosmology class!

Each of the Three Worlds has its own mode of travel; you might skim through the High Umbra on wings of consciousness, or walk the Moon Paths of the Middle Umbra, or stumble into a Nihil in the Underworld. Travel outside the Horizon usually demands some kind of ship unless you're a really talented astral traveler. Each chapter will cover the means of Otherworldly travel. As for crossing between the Three World themselves, I'm told it's a real trick. Supposedly, this involves a radical shift of consciousness — one most explorers won't be able to manage.

Another important note: physically entering the Umbra allows you to use any magick you like. If you enter the Umbra Astrally, you are limited to Mind magick. The good news for everyone is that *all* magick is coincidental in the Umbra. Enjoy!

Staying Safe

Like any place, the Otherworlds have their own hazards. And much like any other new place, you'll be safest if you know how to protect yourself and deal with any situations that might arise. Situations that may arise in the Umbra are analogous to, yet rather different from, those you might encounter on a street in a foreign city.

An important point of vocabulary before we continue. You will see the words "spirit" and "Umbrood" used frequently throughout this book. They're generally the same thing. Some mages might want to make a semantic quibble of it, and point out all the nuances and different shades of meaning, but such differences are hardly important here. Most of the inhabitants of the Umbra Realms are spirits, but you might encounter a material being or two, and sometimes it's next to impossible to tell the difference. Be aware that just because you perceive something doesn't mean it's the truth.

Dealing with the inhabitants of the Umbra is similar to meeting the citizens of a strange country. The spirits who dwell there vary even more than the philosophies of their visitors. More different types of spirits exist there than I can even conceive of, let alone list for you. Many of them will be quite friendly once they get to know you. The best course of action upon meeting a new spirit is to

show it respect. This is even more important in the strange Realms of the Deep Umbra. Determining the power of a spirit is next to impossible just by looking at it. Many spirits can change their forms, their appearances, their communication almost at will. Angering one of them is an extraordinarily poor idea. Use some common sense and don't let your pride get in the way, and you should be okay.

Just as you'll meet the "citizens" of the Umbra, like any tourist you should also be prepared for the weather. Travelers have reported gusts of Umbral Wind blowing through the Umbral regions, knocking them off their path and heading somewhere else entirely. Some speculate that such "storms" are the work of an Avatar interested in going somewhere other than where you're intending, some insist that the winds are the result of tears in the Gauntlet, yet more claim the winds are trying to blow away the stench of stagnation and weaken the Gauntlet. Regardless, be aware of them.

Tourists commonly want to see scenic vistas spreading out before them. Well, the Vistas I'm about to explain aren't necessarily very scenic. Vistas drift through the Umbra, seemingly unconnected to anything else. I do not know of anyone who has ever managed to enter one, and I'm told it is impossible. With the cooperation of friendly Garou, I can tell you what our furry friends know. Umbral travelers have identified four different types of Vistas: Death, Stasis, Chaos and Origin. I don't know of any mages who have seen any others, but no one says there can't be others. Basically, they're pretty self-explanatory. Death Vistas show visions of death (often your own), which can be so realistic that you really think you are dying. Stasis Vistas show you what the world would be like under the Technocracy. Nothing ever changes, nothing grows, nothing moves, and there's really no hope left for anything. Chaos Vistas show you what the mind of a Marauder must look like. The exact antithesis of Stasis Vistas, they aptly illustrate why we do need some order. Origin Vistas are a bit more mysterious, in that they seem to only show an explosion. Some have claimed to see more, including the fragmenting of reality and creation of the Gauntlet, but none of them seem to remember it very well.

That's about it for what I can tell you about the Otherworlds, at least here, I'll be sharing duties with the Fisher Princess to introduce our guest authors and the places they'll be telling you about. I hope you'll find this introduction useful; put some bookmarks in it and refer to it if you get confused. You'll find a glossary of important terms below for your referencing pleasure. If you have any questions or comments, E-mail me at hastingsa@paradigma.com. Hold on to your hats, grab the nearest Spirit Master and your power source and here we go! Good luck and happy traveling!





The Fisher Princess

First: I am writing for and co-editing this book under protest, because I owe Alexis a favor and because my father wishes it. I do not agree with them that this kind of knowledge should be set down in static form. Time kills information. They speak of future updates, and more editions when needed, but this goes against my second objection: written down, printed and available on the Digital Web, this information is readily available to our enemies.

On the other hand, the basic survival skills and sweeping cosmological explanations may save a few lives. Porthos and Alex feel this benefit outweighs the risks. I don't know.

Therefore, I swear to you that all I shall tell you is true, to the best of my knowledge. Some things which I know about the Outer Realms are best left unmentioned, some I have promised to withhold, and some even Doissetep Press agrees are too dangerous to our cause if published. I tell you now that I am not telling you everything.

Second: My name is Dindaine, and I am called by some the Fisher Princess. I am 23 years old and female and English is my first language. Though I do not claim membership in any Tradition, my mindset is closest to that of the Virtual Adepts.

I introduce myself in this fashion for a reason: Any guidance we can give you is slanted already by who we are. When you read Lord Gilmore's monograph on the Mercurian Cosmology, remember that he is a Hermetic mage. What he knows about the Umbrae is supremely valuable to others in the Order, useful to like-minded Traditions, but (unless the reader has an excellent grasp of the workings of the universe) useless, or even harmful, to Dreamspeakers.

So. Know your navigator.

Third: The best advice I can give you on actual travel in the Umbrae is to throw this book away and find a real worldwalker to teach you. The Dreamspeakers are best.

If you can't do that, put this book down and go read *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster. I'm not kidding. Do it, and then come back to Alex and me.

These things are important, particularly if you have had the misfortune (like Alex and myself) of having a modern Western education. We are all crippled. For years our schools have taught us nine-planet, one-sun, airless, Etherless, Umbraless, barren cosmology. The map of the Solar System provided by the Consensus is wrong in almost every respect.

The one thing that the mundane map of the system is good for is this: It shows relative distance between worlds. The distance isn't important, but the farther away two bodies are in the mundane map, the more difficult it is to travel between them. More on this in the spacefaring sections of the book.

Fourth: Be careful, and be polite. Alexis said it, I say it, and anyone who survives the Otherworlds says it. We will probably say it many more times before this book is through.

The Mercurian Cosmology

Written for this volume by Lord Edward Gilmore.

Once upon a time, there was no such thing as common knowledge *about* the Otherworlds, the Umbrae or even the Moon. Mages relied on experimentation and word of mouth for navigation through the Tellurian. Hastily scribbled maps and a few well-known portal sequences were the only tools available. Travel was based on skill and intuition.

In some ways, this was preferable to our modern attitudes; formlessness and namelessness seem to fit the universe better. The spirits we encounter in every corner of the universe respect those abilities far more than cartographic mechanical know-how, or blind obedience to established rules.

At the time of the first Council, however, it became apparent to every Tradition that the only real advantage our side possessed over the Order of Reason was free, individual Umbral travel. Chantries like Horizon and Doissetep could move to other Realms without cutting themselves off completely only because their members were (and are) capable of 'commuting' to and from the Earth and the other battlefield of the Ascension War.

The Mercurian Cosmology was developed over a 20 year period (roughly 1501 to 1521) by members of the *Collegis Mercuris Batini* and *Hermetic Masters* working in concert attempted to define and explain the workings of the major features of the universe. The *Ahl-i-Batin* contributed huge amounts of solid data, folklore and a deep understanding of the nature of space and Correspondence. The

Order of Hermes provided logic, consistency and what some consider an overly-analytical approach. The members of the *Colleger* relied on student volunteers and independent scholars and cabals (including the legendary *Circle of Seven*) to double-check their theories and explore areas left vague in travelers' tales.

To modern mages, the Cosmology's conclusions seem obvious and antiquated. It is important to remember that at the time, even Masters could be completely ignorant of everyday things like the *Mirror Zone*, *Horizon Realms*, or the moons of Jupiter.

The Cosmology contains the first written mention of the *Three Worlds* theory. That there are within the *Horizon* three separate, overlapping Umbrae. The High or Astral Umbra is the province of thought and inspiration of ideal reason. The Middle or Spirit Umbra is the most

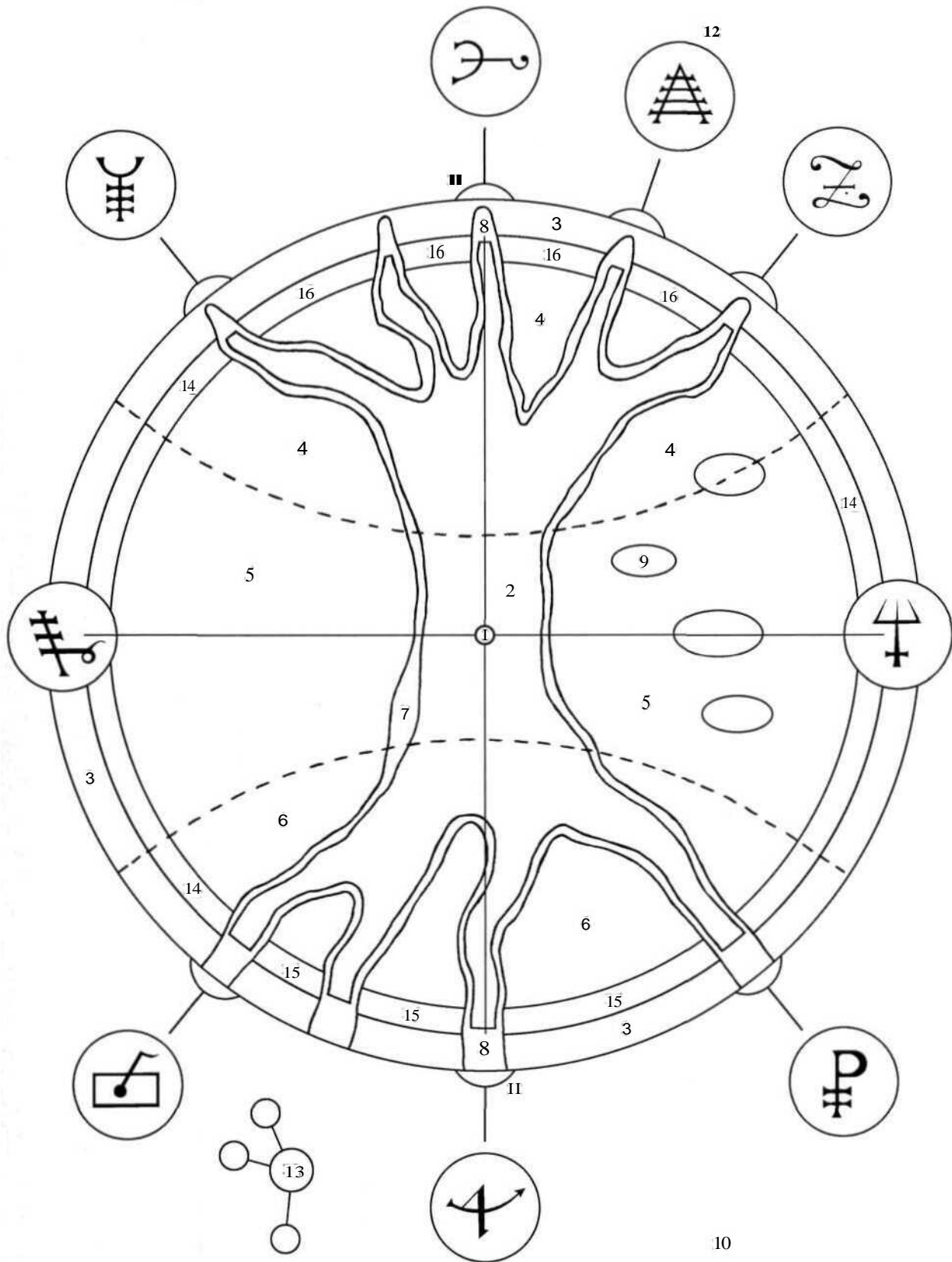
commonly traveled to and most easily understood: this is the home of spirits, shapechangers, Bygones, and the memories of planets. The Low or Dark Umbra is the most frightening and the least understood, even now. It is the domain of the restless dead, "negative" spirits and despair. The most striking conclusion of the Cosmology's authors was that High, Middle and Low were misleading terms, suggesting that travel between the High and Low must pass through the Middle. The *Circle of Seven* proved otherwise.

The *Colleger* made its second stunning breakthrough with the realization that the *Dream Zone*, the *Mirror Zone* and the "space" in which the *Qutb* telepathic network existed (now better known as the *Digital Web*) were three examples of the same phenomenon. All three were listed in the *Enigmas* section of the manuscript (as in this book) despite the lack of classification. The authors could not agree on enough common elements to give a new term to the three, and they became known as the *Great Enigmas*.

What they could and did say was that all three seem to extend in every direction, from the point of view of an observer inside. From the outside, however, all three seem to be "slimy," almost two-dimensional. If the three Umbrae were a triple-decker layer cake, and you took a knife, cutting it into three slices, the *Mirror Zone*, the *Dream Zone*, and the *Digital Web* would be the spaces in between the cake. An ant walking along the top of the cake would be able to step across the gap and continue his journey, or climb down into the cut. In the cake, as in reality, the top part of the cut would have elements in common with the cake around it. The *Digital Web*, for instance, has "dark sectors" near the points where one can cross into the Low Umbra.

According to the heavily *Batini*-influenced Cosmology, the point at which all three Umbrae and all three Great Enigmas crossed would be *Mount Qaf's* highest peak, and the mountain itself marked the crossroads between all worlds. The authors, never having had the good fortune to encounter chocolate layer cake, used the classical analogy of the *World Tree*. In this version, *Mount Qaf* becomes the heartwood of the Tree.

Besides these substantial (and still accepted) theoretical contributions, the Cosmology also undertook the immense task of defining and standardizing the language used (by the analytical Traditions) in discussing the universe. Not all of their terms were accurate, and many are no longer used today, but the Cosmology is a work in progress. The following glossary includes the definitions of the modern version.



The Mercurian Cosmology

1. Midrealm (Mount Qaf) 2. Material World 3. Horizon 4. High Umbra 5. Middle Umbra 6. Low Umbra 7. Penumbra 8. Anchorheads
 9. Umbral Realms (found in all three Umbrae) 10. Deep Umbra/ Etherspace 11. Shade Realms/ Planets 12. Shard Realms/ Planets 13. Paradox Realms
 14. Aetherial Reaches 15. Oblivion 16. Courts The Zones overlap and are part of everything.

Lexicon

Airt: An Otherworldly trail left by a spirit's passage. Hard to find, but more flexible than **Moon Paths**.

Aisling: A journey into the Otherworlds.

Astral Travel: Entering the Otherworlds by projecting one's mind from his body, leaving the body behind.

Domains: Places in the Penumbra sustained by some otherreality. Domains usually contain some powerful Resonance related to their energies. Corrupt areas are called **blights**, while areas of purity are called **glens**. Gateways past the Horizon are known as **Anchorheads**.

Far Umbra: Space outside the Horizon. This is where the three Umbrae are one, indistinguishable. Also called the **Deep Umbra**, **Deep Universe**, **Etherspace** and the **Void**.

Gauntlet: The barrier between the Penumbra of a planet and the mundane side. Only four Realms are known to have one: the Earth, the Moon, Venus and Mars.

Great Enigmas: The Dream Zone, the Mirror Zone, and the Digital Web.

High Umbra: The World of ideas made manifest; divided into the **Vulgate** (common concepts), **Courts** (Umbrood Realms) and **Epiphamies** (abstract concepts), which can often be reached only through Astral travel,

Horizon, The: The "barrier" separating the Near Umbra from the Far or Deep Umbra. I include barrier in quotes because the Horizon is not a sharply defined obstacle; it is a wide belt of space only slightly more difficult to pass than the areas within and without it. Even so, the Nephandi and their kind find it difficult to cross.

Maya: The Dream Zone, also called the **Dreaming** by the fae and the **Dreamtime** by Australian shamans. An enigmatic universe in which normal laws do not apply. See **Zone**.

Moon Paths: Glowing paths which run through the Middle Umbra at night, and cross into the lower levels of the High Umbra.

Near Umbra: Space inside the Horizon. This is where the Three Worlds exist.

Overlap Zone: Whenever two Realms overlap or exert great influence over one another, a new "Realm" is formed. The most famous of these are the Verbena Seasonal Realms, formed by the overlap of Venus' Spirit Realm with the Shade Realm of Life.

Pattern Web: A network of spirit-webs which bind the Middle Umbra to the high and Low Worlds, and criss-cross between Realms there. Garou myth claims these webs tie creation together.

Penumbra: The spirit aspect of a planet. Earth has three, one in each Umbra. Mars, Luna and Venus each have one,

Pericarp: The "Gauntlet" around a Realm, which often resembles a shimmering mist or an opaque shell from the outside. Walking into a Realm without using the "door" (a portal or gateway) requires getting around the pericarp (using Spirit 5).



Periphery: The state of perceiving the Otherworlds while remaining on the mundane side of a Gauntlet.

Portal: A more-or-less permanent gateway to a Realm. A temporary portal is called a **Gate**.

Realm: Anything you can stand on or in, as opposed to the "empty space" of the Umbrae. Types: Paradox Realm, Horizon Realm, Dream Realm, Court, planet, moon. Astral Realm, and (technically) Overlap Zone or Great Enigma.

Shade Realm: The shadow cast by a Shard Realm upon the Horizon. Although they seem to "mirror" the nine Shards, they differ from the "scientific" portrait of those worlds in many ways. Also known as **S.R.**, as in "S.R. Matter."

Shard Realm: A large fragment of the One, by Chorus definition. In plain English, the Sun, the nine planets and Luna.

Shenti: Three theoretical ur-Realms in the Deep Umbra, epitomizing stasis (Weaver), dynamism (Wyld) and entropy (Wyrn). Each seems to have a "reflection" in the Near Umbra, as well as floating Anchorheads leading directly to the Realms themselves.

Gamespeak

The world is a beautiful book, but of little use to him who cannot read it.

— Carlo Goldoni

Hi, folks! This is your developer speaking. While character narrations are fun—and essential when you're describing something as subjective as the Otherworlds—there's a time for simple gamespeak. A time for presenting the rules.

Now, I have kind of a dilemma where rules are concerned. I hate 'em. When running a game myself, I tend to avoid using them as much as possible. However, I also realize what a mess a Storyteller can get into while free-forming a game, particularly if she's got a couple of dreaded Chart-Checking Loophole-Finders nesting in her chronicle. Sometimes, we just need to know how to resolve a situation: How does a mage reach the Shadowlands? How well does Spirit magick work in Autochthonia? Obviously, we need a few rules to run our Mage games, and we need them in a place we can find easily in the midst of play.

In the back of this book is an Appendix composed entirely of rules, grouped chapter by chapter for easy reference. These are the "official" systems—as official as they get, anyway. You can use whichever ones you like, and discard whichever ones get in the way. When running Otherworlds, it's often good to keep your players guessing. After all, a Realm isn't very mysterious when a player exclaims "Hey, I know how to get out of this! Use Life 3, Prime 5, roll eight successes at difficulty 8, and we're free!" Use these rules as you will. They should save you an agonized call to my office :-).

Before we begin, I also wanted to offer you Storytellers a few bits of advice for running the Otherworlds in general. As I said, the rules are in the back. Have fun!

Silver Cord: The mystickal connection between a mortal body and that person's astral form.

Spires: High Umbral towers and mountains representing an elevated state of mind. To reach the highest Astral Realms, a traveler must either pass through a portal or ascend one of the Spires.

Stepping Sideways: Walking through the Gauntlet and entering the Umbrae in "solid" form.

Three Worlds: The Umbræ •- Hi«h, Middle and Low — which embody elements of our own world, Earth.

Videre: The perspective an Umbral traveler gets when she views the material world from the Penumbra. Depending on her orientation, she may see things through either the **Astral Videre**, the **Videre Spiritus** or the **Videre Mortum**.

Zone: A reality which permeates, the Near Umbra, yet exists in a separate space, Maya, the **Mirror Zone**, the **Digital Web** and the odd **Vistas** are examples of Zones. Also called **Great Enigmas**, because no one really understands them.

Storyteller Hints

- **The Otherworlds are ever-changing:** We're not talking about solid places, here, the Otherworlds exist in a constant state of flux. Even veteran travelers are often surprised by the way things change between visits. While the general nature of a Realm will usually (not always!) remain the same, some subtle changes will always occur over time. In short, nothing here is set in stone.

- **The Otherworlds are infinite:** Imagine every idea you ever had became a place; now imagine that every idea *everybody* had became a place, if only for a moment. Get the picture.' Anything you want to do with the Otherworlds can be done. The handful of Realms presented in this book remain more or less as they're described, at least in the modern world. Dream Realms, Paradox Realms and Astral Worlds change constantly, however, and often appear differently to the same people in the same place. You want your troupe to adventure in your favorite novel for a while? It's floating out there in the Dream Realms, and just because the characters might recognize where they are, doesn't mean they can predict what's going to happen during their stay!

This book is a guideline; the only limits on your chronicle are your own imagination and your willingness to experiment.

- **Keep rules to a minimum; description is king:** Hard systems not only restrict the possibilities of your world, they also get predictable, especially if you have one of those annoying players who buys all the books before you do! Don't feel restricted by the rules unless you need something to fall back on.

When running an adventure in one of the Otherworlds, emphasize atmosphere, description and uncertainty over chart-checking. Since many of these Realms spring from an archetype, the stories that take place in them will be larger than life. Voices will be louder, colors brighter and vistas grander than anything our tired Earth has to offer. Rather than constantly repeating "It's big! It's *really* big!," you may want to concentrate on emotional reactions, sensory impressions and each characters' background. "Alissa," you might tell the Dreamspeaker in Authothonia, "you feel an almost physical oppression here, as if a 10-ton weight was lowered onto your coffin, sealing you inside. *You*, on the other hand," you tell the Virtual Adept, "have never seen a toybox like *this* in your life!" The world that flows from a group of impressions will be far more engaging and immediate than one which begins "You go 20 feet down this corridor, then turn right. There are three doors at the end of the hall. Which one do you open?" In short, keep the rules out of the picture unless you need them. When you do need them, see the Appendix.

Using This Book

Within each chapter, all the Realms have been laid out in a similar fashion:

Each place begins with a Description, which shows us what many travelers have seen; the Background offers the most commonly-known history of the land (which may or may not be true, depending on your wishes); **Places of Interest** display a variety of important locations within the Realm; Finally, **Ecology** explains how the Realm maintains itself, and mentions important figures there. Rules systems are offered at the back of the book.

Other References

Even a book as huge as **Beyond the Barriers** can't offer all the possibilities for every denizen of the World of Darkness. The rules and Realms we describe are familiar places in our vision of the World of Darkness. They need not appear or work the same way in your personal chronicle.

Although this book is made to be self-contained, some rules systems and specific details must be left to other game books. The Mage Second Edition rulebook has the basic cosmology and essential systems you'll need in Chapters One and Nine, but a few other rulebooks and supplements may be helpful for intricate adventures and crossovers:

- Spirits and Bygones, and the rules for same: **Werewolf: The Apocalypse, Werewolf Players Guide, Book of the Wyrms, Axis Mundi, Umbra: The Velvet Shadow, The Book of Madness** and **Ascension's Right Hand**.

- The Shadowlands: **Wraith: The Oblivion, Wraith Players Guide, Sea of Shadow** and **Dark Kingdom of Jade**.

- The Dreaming: **Changeling; The Dreaming** and **Nobles: The Shining Host**.

- Horizon Realms, Chantries and the Web; **The Book of Chantries** and **Digital Web** (recently reprinted together as Mage Classics) and **Horizon: The Stronghold of Hope**.

- Space travel, and tools for same: Sons of Ether and Void Engineers, Bill Bridges' novel *The Silver Crown* has a nice description of Umbral travel, and it's a fun read, besides.

- Non-White Wolf inspirations include several DC/Vertigo comics titles (*Sandman, Shade: The Changing Man, Swamp Thing, John Constantine: Hellblazer, Doom Patrol, The Invisibles*, and *Books of Magic*), *Realms of Fantasy* by M. Edwards and R. Holdstock, and any number of fantasy novels. Books on symbolism can be really helpful, especially Carl Jung's *Psyche and Symbol* and David Fontana's *The Secret language of Symbols*. Alice K. Turner's *The History of Hell*, Dante's *Inferno* and H.P. Lovecraft's *Dreamlands* books can be invaluable inspirations. Compilations of art by M.C. Escher, Edward Blake, H.R. Giger, Frank Frazetta, J.K. Potter, Susan S. Boulet and any number of fantasy artists offer Storytellers some visual stimulation, and films like *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, City of Lost Children, Forbidden Zone, Dreamscape, The Dark Crystal, The Never-Ending Story, Time Bandits, 2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the *Aliens* movies can set your imagination spinning into the right realms. Have fun!



Chapter One: Astral Worlds

We are the stuff that dreams are made of.
- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Hey, folks! Alexis here. Ready to tie our brains in a knot? Good! Let's begin.

By definition, an Astral Realm is anything you can stand on inside the Astral Umbra. In practical terms, what you're standing on are clusters of fairly solid thoughts. They begin on the fringes of the Penumbra and work outward from there. As the concepts they represent grow more and more abstract, the Realms grow further and further "away," becoming harder and harder to reach, until only the most advanced minds can even comprehend them.

Just as all beings with souls or spirits are present in the Middle Umbra in some small way, every thinking being has a slight presence in the High Umbra. Minds (human, dog, dolphin, Umbrood or other) jump from idea to idea, and

dreaming minds in particular seem to travel instantly between Realms. Each mind that passes through an area leaves a track or residue. Some thinkers build up an area, some break it down, but most have no effect. Real dreamers and true iconoclasts are rare.

Astral Realms occur naturally when many people invent or consider the same concept. They occur artificially when spirits, Incarna, powerful Umbrood or great mages gather thought-stuff together. The most advanced Realms, the Epiphamies, extend past human thought patterns altogether. I assume that Oracles of the mental disciplines form such refuges from the tapestries of their own minds. Since no one I've ever met can verify having traveled so far out, my own thoughts on the matter will have to occupy Realms of their own. :-)

How to Get There

Again I'm frustrated by the limits of my medium — it is almost impossible to explain this in static form. Bear with me, and don't expect too much.

Essentially, most travelers into the astral reaches *think* their way there. It's easiest to begin in the Spirit Umbra and then move "up." Whether you start there or on Earth proper, the procedure is the same. Open your senses to the Periphery, and try to focus, not on the "feel" of your perceptions but on the "essence." Vague, I know. There are better words for the concept, but they vary by Tradition. What you're trying for is to use Mind in the same way to go "up" that you use Spirit to go "across." With practice, and a knowledge of both Spheres, you can choose between the two Worlds after entering the Periphery, but start by planning to go "up" all along.

Those who see with astral sight (see Introduction) perceive the Penumbra in abstract form, like patterns of energy and light. You can go all over the place from there — some travelers I've spoken to have almost entered orbit. Entering the Realms, however, requires going through some transition — through a door, over a bridge, into a mirror, a puddle or a halo of light, that sort of thing. Sometimes, these transitions offer themselves to you; more often than not, though, you have to go looking for them. Once you pass through, you're in the Realm and have to find your way out in the same fashion.

The lowest levels of this World — the Vulgate Realms of common concepts — can be reached by travelers who step sideways through the spirit Gauntlet, then find doorways, bridges or windows into the Realms themselves. The Pattern Web described in Chapter Two also winds into the lower areas of the Vulgate, and heaven, suicidal explorers can climb into the Realms that way. Sectors in the Digital Web open into the Vulgate, too, and I know a few folks who've walked their way into the High Umbra from this Zone. If you *do* take your body into the High Realms, you may have trouble moving once you get there. Some people cannot move at all, others need to think consciously about every step, some can walk normally, and a very few can walk, but find it easier to glide smoothly and quickly from place to place. Travelers with bodies are supposedly limited by the Vulgate's "borders"; more esoteric Realms can be achieved only through the mind.

Astral travel is so simple it appears complex. If you can find a teacher, learn directly. If you cannot, then experiment *very* carefully. Though conventional wisdom has it that the High Umbra is the least corrupt, least dangerous of the Three "Worlds, the comparison is misleading. It's like saying that dynamite is safer than an atom bomb. True but unhelpful.

The Territory

Think about the last Escher print you saw. Think about your philosophy class from college. Think about the mathematics of a snowflake, or the verbs of a rainbow. That's what the landscape looks like here. It can rain choices, or snow alphabets. Seemingly rock-solid ground can fall out from under you and leave you clinging to calculus. Be careful.

As for geography: The Astral Umbra is definitely stratified; the farther "up" and "out" you go, the more rarefied become the concepts that form the Realms and their residents. The more abstract the region, the more surreal and treacherous your journey becomes.

The Penumbra, Doorways and Vulgate

The Vulgate lies closest to Earth. The easiest thoughts to deal with are the basics of existence — the idea of a chair, or the thought of the sky. What is, and is obvious, is here. Any mage who needs to ask what the Penumbra's like shouldn't even consider traveling beyond there (see Introduction).

The doorways into the Vulgate proper are fairly easy to find, and often appear to be mundane parts of the Penumbra. If you were walking through a building on the other side of the Gauntlet, for instance, you might open one of the doors, only to encounter a Vulgate Realm on the other side. Scary! Once you're in the Vulgate, the Umbrascapes range from the surreal to the ridiculous. The "common ground" lying between the Realms twists into impossible shapes which get weirder the "higher" you go. This is the land great fantasy artists — Escher, Ditko, Carroll, Boulet and so many others — visit in their dreams, if not the flesh.

The Spires

As the Vulgate grows more abstract, sharply defined structures interrupt the view. Called the *Spires* by most, they appear as ridges, mountains or towers originating in the Vulgate, ascending so high into the Astral Umbra that their peaks cannot be seen from below. The Courts, heavens, hells and such are built on, in or as part of, the Spires. The coarsest elements (fire and brimstone, harps and fluffy clouds) sit low on the Spires — nearly in the Vulgate. The Epiphamies drift around the peaks and beyond. Those who would reach the Courts must travel through the Spires.

Cosmologists theorize that the Spires are the result of many minds of various sophistication all concentrating on the same idea. A medieval European farmer, for example, would have a very different concept of Heaven than Mark Twain, but the two men's visions would still build on the same foundation. A great many fictional places — the Mythic Realms described in Chapter Two — intersect with the Spires along the "border" between the Vulgate and the Courts. In the Eastern Court



Realm, for example, Chinese folklore, Hong Kong films and the Umbrood Heavens blend together almost indistinguishably. From one Astral Court, a traveler can reach into related Mythic Realms, and vice versa.

To climb the Spires, envision yourself doing so; to your mind, it'll appear that you're wandering through a series of caverns, halls and stairs leading ever upward. Flying or floating is possible if you know how. Remember, this is a *metaphysical* trip, not a *physical* one. The Spires simply represent an ascending state of consciousness. There is, as I've said, an upper limit to this climb; physical and spiritual travelers freeze solid or fade away before they reach the Courts; only those of sound mind can go further, unless the explorer crosses through some portal linking the Realm to the Earth. According to the stories I've heard, people killed in the Spires wander between Realms forever, denied access to any of them. In other words, *be careful!*

The Courts

This astral layer forms the home of various Umbrood spirits who have chosen to set up shop. Here the traveler may find the heavens and hells called "Afterworlds"; the many lands of the gods and heroes of history and legend; the meeting places of those same beings (which Hermetic lore calls The Umbral Courts; see *The Book of Madness*, Chapter Five), and the sanctuaries of various Umbrood

"species" like the perverse Hestilics, who wish to dwell outside the sight — but within the reach — of humanity.

Once again, be polite. What you meet here may be only the idea of Shiva (for example), but if half the minds in India are generating an Umbrood through sheer belief, that Umbrood is powerful. If the spirit came *before* the idea, then the Celestine Shiva with the belief of half of India behind it is just so much worse. Pardon me, just so much better—no offense intended.

The Epiphanies

High up in this Umbra, the Realms and residents become more abstract, harder to grasp. Few minds can reach this far. Geniuses, great artists — all of them help create the Epiphanies, or regions of sublime ideas. You may have difficulty finding many Realms here, but be assured they do exist. It's just very difficult to visit the Realm of General Relativity if you cannot comprehend the concept in the first place. Keep trying as your understanding grows.

These Realms, which spring from the highest reaches of consciousness, lie quite outside the limited purview of words. How does one detail the Corridor of Pi, or the prismatic streams that pass for Language to our eyes? I can tell you of the manifold angles of Logic or the Kingdoms of Color, but those descriptions would be as fleeting as my fingers across this keyboard. For once a concept is set into words, images or even sounds, it becomes something else.

At the lowest levels of the Epiphamies, the traveler recognises concepts as metaphorical constructs; as with so many other Otherworlds, you see the concept expressed the way you expect to see it. The highest reaches spiral outward beyond the Horizon's restrictions, spinning like Dream Realms off into the endless Void where no one can catalogue them. I've heard that the Oracles dwell (if they exist, of course) in these fluid droplets of pure concept. Mortals cannot visit them because, quite simply, our minds are not comprehensive enough to reach that far. Such

"Realms" are theoretically everywhere yet nowhere at once. Reaching such a state is the goal of Mind Masters, but those few who could be said to have attained it cannot put their experiences into human words or pictures.

That's the map, such as it is: Penumbra, doorways, Vulgate, Spires, Courts and Epiphamies. Have fun, kids, and be careful. One last note: If you *still* haven't read *The Phantom Tollbooth*, do it before you start exploring the Astral Realms. Milo can save your life.

The Vulgate



...the consensus omnium insists on the immateriality of spirit, though not everyone would agree that it also has a reality of its own. It is, however, not easy to see why our hypothetical "matter," which looks quite different from what it did even thirty years ago, alone should be real, and spirit not— Spirit and matter may well be forms of one and the same transcendental being.

—Carl Jung, "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales"

There may be more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Horatio's philosophy, but the collective philosophy of the entire human race (and, some would add, other races as well) creates a bewildering cornucopia of Realms. In the Vulgate, the most easily accessible concepts — invention, transition, travel, warfare, love, etc. — form a spectrum of worlds which dance and pass through each other as human consciousness shifts. There's no single "Land of Love" or "Field of Battles"; instead, Realms with those aspects hover like dragonflies behind an endless and ever-changing series of doorways and windows. If you've ever seen *The Yellow Submarine*, you get the general idea.

Some Realms of the Middle Umbra lie in a flux between the Vulgate and the Middle World. This flux resembles a thick fog shot through with glowing Pattern Webs and Moon Paths. A doorway from the High Worlds might just as easily lead to Dystopia or the Radiance as to the Grand Hallway, The Aetherial Reaches discussed in Chapter Two seem to be an exception — they appear to be off-limits to a lot of us — but the other Realms, especially Mythic Realms, form a hazy boundary between the Middle and High Umbrae,

Astral doorways lie all around the Penumbra, often concealed by glowing mists until you're right on top of them. Some Astral travelers claim that the world which appears behind the door you open is the world you will enter being behind that doorway — that is to say, it's there because you *put* it there. These folks insist there are no accidents in the Astral worlds; every place you find is where you're supposed to be. Asking whether or not the Realm is still there when you aren't is like asking the old question about trees making noise when they fall, and the answers get just as circular. Let's stick to basics: When you find a doorway, step on through. If you dare.

The Grand Hall



But we have tasted wild fruit, listened to strange music;

And all shores of the earth are but as doors of an inn.

—Laurence Binyon

It rises from the Astral mists like a specter -- the Grand Hall of Endless Gates. Sometimes it appears as a building in the Penumbra that has no Earthly counterpart, but most worldwalkers encounter it as a hallway on the other side of some door or window. It never stays in place for long, but always retains a similar shape — a sparse but welcoming corridor between the worlds, shaped in Classical Mediterranean style and furnished in ancient wood and

mosaic tiles. Welcome to the Grand Hall. If you're roving the Astral pathways, you'll be stopping here sooner or later.

Inside, the Grand Hall resembles an endless hallway of Escheresque dimensions and timeless, yet classical, design. Smooth stone floors give way to doorways of all kinds on the walls, ceiling, and occasionally the floor. Some portals lead to stairs, others to mists, still others to pools of water, walls of flame or endless space. Ancient wooden benches wait along the corridor, allowing weary travelers to rest on something other than stone floors. In the "center" of the Hall (as if an endless place could *have* a center), a huge atrium opens out to reveal a huge fountain, big enough to swim in; this fountain is a portal unto itself, but also supplies travelers with fresh waters to drink. Entities, both human and Otherworldly, wander the Hall on mysterious missions. Some love to talk to visitors, others prefer to be left alone.

- Alexandra Calais

Dindaine selected Alexandre for his expertise with the High Realms. A seasoned Astral wanderer, he's also provided a lot of the general information about the various layers of the High Worlds. Although I suspect Alexandra's a Cultist, he's never fit into any particular stereotype for long.

As with so many of our other "special guests," Alexandre has requested that the details of his personality and background remain a secret. He'll be explaining a few of the Epiphamies later in this chapter, as well, but waxes poetic about the Grand Hall, so I let him start his tales with this transitional Realm. It sounds fascinating. Perhaps one day, I'll go there myself.

Background

Sometime around 200 B.C.E., the Grand Hall rose from the mists of consciousness, a waystation for geniuses who couldn't be satisfied with the world they walked upon. As they sought the outer Realms, these sages and sorcerers caused a shelter to come into existence. Through the doors in this endless hall, the early worldwalkers crossed from the spirit realm into more conceptual territories. As the gods packed up and left town, they kept backdoors to their home world in case they ever decided to return.

For several centuries, the Hall was open ground. Nothing grew there, but worldwalkers brought their own food and camped out, occasionally for years on end. Sometime around the first century C.E., a mysterious race of sentinels arrived to police the waystation, a group of celestial bouncers, if you will. From that point on, visitors could wander through the Grand Hall, but not set up residence there. Stragglers and loiterers were sent on their way—eternally, if need be. Since then, the Grand Hall has enjoyed a reputation as neutral ground. Umbrood and Umbral travelers alike meet, share stories and go on their way, usually without bloodshed (metaphorically speaking — no one bleeds in the astral reaches!). A couple of nasty battles have swept through the Realm on occasion; a spat between a group of Henneries and the now-exiled Akaa spirit race nearly demolished the Hall itself. Common need, however, rebuilt the Realm; within a couple of years, no one could tell anything had happened there. Since then, the nameless sentinels have stepped up their patrols and shortened the permissible stay.

Areas of Interest

Aside from its benches, fountain and doors, the Grand Hall is empty. On odd occasions, one traveler might meet another; the traffic is light enough, however, that you can wander the Hall for days and not cross another being's path. The corridors lead in all directions, occasionally branching into stairwells, wells and alcoves. Getting lost is a very real possibility, so it's always a good idea to visit the Hall with an

experienced worldwalker. His sense of direction, honed by years of travel, will prove to be a more reliable compass than random magick. The mud layout of the infinite hallways scrambles Correspondence Arts badly; a mage attempting to use such magicks in the Grand Hall risks getting herself stranded in a part of the Hall no one's even *thought* of yet!

Portals

Ah, but the doors are another matter! Anywhere you can imagine has a door leading to it. Mundane locations, Umbral Realms, Zones, Courts... everywhere that has a door or window nearby can be reached through the Grand Hall portals.

Finding the doorway that gets you where you want to go — now there's the tricky part! You see, the Hall is theoretically endless. A person can wander in the same direction for months and never reach the end of it. The Law of Intent — the principle that you go where you were meant to go — can guide your selection when trying the doors, but there's no guarantee that fate doesn't intend you to reach your destination by some convoluted route....

The portals themselves look like stout wooden doors for the most part. Some resemble wells, stairways or shuttered windows, but most simply take the form of old-fashioned doors. These portals are never locked unless some entity on the other side has taken precautions and warded the passage (which does happen). Naturally, such wards cut both ways. A wise worldwalker keeps a Correspondence ward or two ready, just in case she needs to seal a portal behind her. These doors open both ways.

Passing through the portal is often disorienting, and sometimes leaves the traveler vulnerable to perception or attack by any beings on the other side. I recall an adventure of my own when a hasty exit through one of the doors left me hanging off a skyscraper, 87 stories from the New York City pavement. The portal came out through a window, you see — on the wrong side of the window! Look before you leap, kids!

The Fountain

In a large nexus chamber, a dozen hallways meet. In the center of that huge space, a deep cold pool fills from an eternal fountain, a wellspring said to gather waters from all over the Tellurian. Benches crowd the walls along this central room, and columns hold the tiled roof aloft, but the Fountain dominates the chamber, nearly 20 feet tall and carved from obsidian. Writhing figures reach from the pool up toward the ceiling, frozen in eternal ascension as water jets from their gaping mouths, arcs through the air and returns to the pool at their feet.

Scuttlebutt says these figures were locked into place after the sentinels arrived. Supposedly, they were once a band of squatters who refused to clear out. One of them, a surly godling named Krystobhann, decked one of the ghost-like figures, picked it up, and began to eat it. The sentinel burst into a cascade of water, which splattered upon the



doors around it. Those doors, in turn, dissolved as waters from a dozen rivers and seas poured through the gateways, drowning Krystobhann and his peers as they struggled for air. When the waters receded, the squatters remained, frozen into stone by their arrogance. The story may or may not be true, but I'll tell you this: No one lashes out at the sentinels anymore!

Ecology

Despite its name, the Great Hall is pretty sparse. A few ancient couches, carved from wood in the fashions of the Fertile Crescent Kingdoms (and seemingly as old) line the walls, but no food or water, other than the cold streams of the Fountain, can be found.

No one lives in the Great Hall permanently, although many visitors stay for months on end, wandering from portal to portal. Sooner or later, these vagabonds either perish or settle down, and are not seen again. Those passing through pitch tents, wrap themselves in blankets, or simply sleep on the cold stone floors. Every once in a while, a shimmering host of ghostlike figures sweep through the Hall, driving all settlers before them. Those who do not depart willingly are driven through the nearest portal, to live or die as they will. So the sentinels enforce their decree. Those worldwalkers who would pass through the Hall of Endless Gates are advised to mind their manners. If your "hosts" say leave, then by all that's sacred, *leave!*

The Inventium



*O! for a Muse offire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention.*

- William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*

Someone once said that the Realm of Invention, the Inventium, "gives testimony to humankind's unlimited creativity." It does. Every gizmo, widget, doohickey and thingamajig that anybody ever thought of is here. Giant mountains of things row over-head. Moving around means keeping to the valleys between these mountains, and from there, it's impossible to see in any direction but ahead, behind and above. Overhead, the sky buzzes with airplanes, jets, ornithopters, helicopters and other strange flying machines. Sadly, it's all for show. Almost nobody lives here. The inventions dance of their own accord; without the "material" constraints of Earth's reality, the machines can be themselves.

Getting to the Inventium is easy. Look for the footlocker. It's there, past the spinning moon, on the far side of the Realm of Connectivity, just a plain metal footlocker floating in space. It measures five feet by three feet and is made of iron or some other dull metal. The unremarkable exterior of the footlocker does not attract many people to it. Few would ever expect to find a whole Realm hidden inside it. To further discourage visitors, a magical inscription

upon the interior of the lid reads, "This passage prohibited. Any who ignore this warning will incur the most grievous censure."

A warm breeze blows from the footlocker's interior and the distant sound of machinery echoes out. To get in, step into the footlocker. A metal staircase descends to open air. The stairs turn every 10 feet or so, with a landing between each level. Odd flying machines may swoop near the staircase, buzzing too close for comfort. From this vantage point, several hundred yards above the floor of the Realm, the view is fantastic! Above, where the footlocker should be, the top landing just hangs in mid-air. Below, the Inventium spreads off into infinity, a vast writhing pile of things, all the inventions of the world.

My name is Herodotus, and I am the leader of the Historians, a team of mages who have accepted the weighty responsibility of documenting each item that arrives here, I personally have been here for decades. Recent activity on the part of the Technocracy has forced my hand. I have decided to come forward and relay what I can of the Inventium before it's totally conquered by this short-sighted organization and memory of it is eradicated from Awakened society.

Billions of gadgets wheeze, honk and whir in the Inventium. The machines create a cacophony of different sounds. Colored lights flash and blink from all sides. Mile-high mountains of inventions pile up to divide the Realm into a network of valleys and tunnels. The floor of the Inventium disappears beneath heaps of "New Formulas" and "better mousetraps." The flapping, zinging and popping of the diverse flying machines add to the din. Robots and other mobile monstrosities roam the floor.

The arrival of a new invention is like a birth. They squeeze from the sky, pressing apart the fabric of the Realm, to fall gently down on top of the others. An unmistakable "pop" accompanies the arrival of each new item. This birth process is remarkable to see and occurs on an average of twice a day. At one time, it happened more regularly, as often as twice a minute, but that was over a century ago. Truly unique inventions have become more and more rare as time passes and civilization advances.

- Herodotus

Don't ask me where I met Herodotus; the story's way too complicated to print. Let's just say we have some friends in common, friends who introduced us during a... moment of crisis in my life. We parted ways amicably enough, but he always stuck in my mind afterward. Like the footlocker that opens to his domain, Herodotus seems to spin in my mind like an anti-gravity flip-flair top. What's an anti-gravity flip-flair top? Well, I've got one in my room, right beside my writing desk. It does the most wondrous things with light. Where did Herodotus get it? Read on. I suspect he found it somewhere in the Inventium. As I understand it, mine's a one-of-a-kind model....

Background

A museum of sorts, the Inventium collects items which document the path of history as well as, if not better than, any textbook could. The first wheel leans against the first iceless refrigerator. A bone hoe lies on top of a teletypewriter. A 78-rpm record sits upon a VAX machine.

Four mages, brothers, discovered the Inventium in 424 B.C. Known only as the Sons of Thucydides, the brothers realized the usefulness and resale value of the items in the Realm. One of the brothers, an engineer, drew schematics of the inventions. The others established contacts who purchased the schematics. Over a lifetime, the brothers became rich. Their descendants took up the saga where the brothers left off, gradually becoming known as the Scavengers. To this day, they still retrieve inventions in order to create and sell their schematics.

Shortly after its discovery, word of the Inventium reached a particularly powerful mage, Herodotus, a friend to the Sons of Thucydides. He immediately realized the import of the discovery, Herodotus had mentored the brothers and easily convinced them to take him to the Realm. Once Herodotus had seen the Realm, he acted quickly. Back in Athens, he gathered together four of his most trusted colleagues, philosophers who shared his enthusiasm for preserving history. When he described what he had seen, the others agreed immediately that the Inventium represented an opportunity that they could not overlook. Thus, the five mages exiled themselves to the Realm and began the unending task of cataloging the history of human invention. Eventually, their descendants called themselves the Historians, members of the Historia. Time passed. Historians died and were replaced. New leaders took the name "Herodotus" and carried on his legacy. Although it's said he still survives somewhere amid the inventions, no one has spoken to him in centuries. Not even those who bear his name.

By the year 1496, the flourishing Traditions had begun to notice the Inventium. Convinced that they should have a hand in the protection and documentation of the Realm, four Traditions met (the Order of Hermes, the Akashic Brotherhood, the Celestial Chorus, and the Verbena), and decided among themselves that each Tradition should have a representative in the Realm. (The Cult of Ecstasy, Ahl-i-Batin and Dreamspeakers excluded themselves. The Solificati had disbanded. Virtual Adepts and sons of Ether did not yet exist and the Order of Reason had other plans.) Rather than create their own organization, these Traditions got together and sent an ambassadorial envoy to negotiate with the Historians. They proposed a restructuring of the Historia. The Historians, for their part, knew the world was changing. They agreed, and a member from each of these Traditions joined the Historia.

The Historia had long ago developed a code of ethics for the documentation of the Realm, a set of laws called the *Historia Doctrine*. Each new member was required to take a vow based on this Doctrine, which forbade the use of the inventions for personal profit and the transfer of information gathered on the inventions to anyone outside the Historia without the unanimous approval of the others. Basically, the Historians document; they don't interfere with the politics or power struggles of the world. They are required by their vow to remain more loyal to the *Historia Doctrine* than to their own Traditions. Only on rare occasions has a Historian broken this vow on behalf of his Tradition. The penalty each time was harsh — from exile to death.

Under normal circumstances, membership in the Historia lasts for life. When one of the Tradition mages dies, the remaining four request nominations from the Tradition of the vacant seat. They then interview the candidates and elect a replacement. Recently, it has become difficult to find voluntary candidates to replace deceased Historians. Seats remain open for years at a time and, as in the case of the current representative from the Order of Hermes, sometimes the Tradition chooses a candidate for the position, whether the candidate agrees or not.

Late in the 19th century, the Technocracy arrived in the Realm. Until that time, the Historians had no other competitors aside from the Scavengers, with whom they had established a mutually beneficial working relationship, and the random visitor who happened to stumble in. The Technocracy raised the stakes. They rushed to acquire new inventions before the Historians could get to them and caused the Historians to lose track of many items that, as a result, have never been documented.

In 1895, the Technocrats established a research facility in the Realm, a giant brick building surrounded by tall fences. Shortly thereafter, they began a systematic extermination of the Scavengers, the Historians, and all other rivals. The Technocracy sees the Inventium as its own personal giant Umbral storehouse, and its agents inscribed the warning on the footlocker to frighten away other profiteers. They would have sealed the lid if it had been possible. Many mages theorize that the Technocracy went to such extreme measures merely to stay on the cutting edge of technology. This is hardly true; instead, they use it to control and eliminate any invention that falls outside their control. After the Virtual Adepts' successful defection, the outpost's ruthlessness increased. When possible, they track down items that don't fit into their definition of "reality," often using the item to find the inventor and eliminate him or her as a creative force in the world.

Just after the turn of the century, the Sons of Ether took notice of the Inventium and established their own small research facility there. The Sons, unlike the Technocracy, tend to keep to themselves. Their secret base, buried deep in the mountains of inventions, still eludes the HIT Marks that patrol the Realm. The Sons' stake in the Realm

parallels that of the Technocracy, but they concentrate more on ancient artifacts than new inventions, seeking items that depart from traditional science. The Technocracy's influence on modern scientific thought has limited the number of strange items appearing currently in the Inventium; more ancient times, however, may hold clues to lost branches of scientific theory, so the Sons dig down to the bottoms of the piles.

The Sons and the Technocrats seem engaged in an intermittent game of "tweak the nose." Every so often, one faction will cross the other's line, a minor reprisal or two will occur, and then both sides return to business as if nothing had happened. The few Etherites who reside here seem quite content to hang out, soaking up inspiration from the multitude of odd and interesting items that exist in the Realm. Only during the greatest emergencies do they venture out to battle the Technocratic squatters, and they offer little aid to the Scavengers. Only the Historians interest them. These mages the Sons protect. One never knows when a favor or two might come in handy to his pet project,...

Places of Interest

I would certainly say that the main items of interest here are the mountains of inventions themselves. You have no idea how extensive the catalogue of human resourcefulness is until you gaze upon the thousands {if not millions} of inventions, variations, improvements, experiments and graceful failures. An invention doesn't have to function to enter the Realm, it simply needs to be new and interesting. Everything from electric guitars to steam-powered phonographs, from picture frames to methane-powered cars can be found somewhere in the Realm.

As the original Scavengers soon discovered, the Realm can be a cruel joke on profiteers. Although transcriptions and schematics can be taken from the Inventium's treasure trove, the inventions themselves fade from existence once they pass the footlocker portal. Myself, I think they're the *dreams* of inventions, passing through the common consciousness until they manifest in this Realm. Once a visitor leaves the Inventium, he awakens from this "inspiration" and rejoins the mundane world. Even if he just passes into another Astral world, the spark of novelty disappears, like those half-remembered dreams where the secret you've been looking for lands right in your hands but fades away before you can write it down.

The Hackworth Technological Compilation Facility

Located near the center of the Realm, the Hackworth Construct (named for the Iterator who discovered the Realm) stands in a clear circle of land. This old-style factory is the only place in the entire Realm that is not covered with piles of thingamajigs. The 20-man staff (no women) stationed here includes 10 Enlightened Technocrats and 10

mundane technicians. 10 more HIT Mark Vs (plus a variety of experimental robots and cyborgs, some of which even work) wander the Realm searching for Scavengers and unwanted visitors. The overworked human staff works diligently to keep the arriving inventions from piling up on their roof and lawn, while the enforcer cyborgs keep us renegades in line.

The building itself is a large brick structure surrounded by chain-link fences topped with barbed wire. The Technocracy has undoubtedly installed various forms of self-monitored security devices. Outsiders who have ventured into the factory's recesses have not returned. An Iteration X Statistician named Casey Z1193 runs the facility with customary—if listless—efficiency. The Constructs food and goods come through a direct portal from Autothonia. Or from MECHA. No one outside the factory quite knows for sure,

Exington Hall

The Etherite facility—if you can find it—looks more like Frankenstein's castle than anything else. Flashes of light occur regularly in the mansion's windows, which are placed high in thick stone walls surrounded by mounds of gadgets. The double front doors, made of iron, have a thick locking mechanism that "chungs" into place once the doors close. Here and there, inventions sit on the roof like mechanical gargoyles. The Sons are, shall we say, less diligent about cleaning off newly arrived inventions than the Technocrats are.

Inside the Hall, a cluttered Victorian ambiance prevails. Scavenged furniture, piled with papers, widgets, books and ashtrays, broods in dim corridors and rooms. Even the kitchen and dining room are thick with exotic tobacco smoke (where they get their tobacco is anyone's guess; I assume they grow it there somehow). Five Ether Scientists (four men, one woman) dwell in Exington Hall; three assistants wait on their masters at all hours. Lord Johann Bigham oversees the Hall with curt, mannered tolerance. Although few living things reside in the Hall (a handful of mongrel animals are said to live as pets, and visitors claim to have met terrifying black dogs in the courtyard), the mansion's corridors are crammed with curios, research notes and knickknacks. Visitors are welcome, but not encouraged to enter or to stay.

The Verbena Garden

Over the years, Verbena Historians have cleared an area two acres square where plants and animals live and grow. This Verbena Garden and its chirping birds seem totally out of place among the bings and chugs of the otherwise mechanically oriented Realm. Though this Garden is small, the Verbena Historians designed it as a shelter where they could come to meditate and commune with nature. When the Verbena Tradition exiled its first

representative among the Historians, he soon discovered that the cold, metallic nature of the Realm depressed him badly. The garden was his solution.

Small animals, such as mice, birds and rabbits, live in the tiny garden. Tall green hedges surround the perimeter, keeping out some of the sound and adding to the illusion, from the inside, of being in a natural environment. The garden adheres to a natural progression of seasons, from Spring flowers to Autumn leaves. Peach, cherry and apple trees and berry bushes produce lush, sweet fruit when in season. A stone cottage, dating from the first Verbena's tenure, sits lazily amid a small copse of trees. The oak outside its walls is less red than most, but blazes with Otherworldly power. Lady Autumn Rivers keeps the place clear of the gadgets which occasionally fall from the sky; although she enjoys the opportunities to examine new gadgets, she diligently guards this sanctum against technological corruption,

The Scavengers' Refuge

Deep underground, the descendants of the first visitors to the Realm scuttle about in dim and gloomy quarters. The Technocrats put them at the top of the extermination list a long time ago, for threatening to usurp new technologies from their control. To survive the HIT Mark incursions, the Scavengers burrowed under the mountains of old inventions and built a hunker from which they only rarely emerge.

Abraham Germano oversees the Refuge with careful intensity. Each of the 20 or so Scavengers is a personal friend, and he takes any death among them very hard. For survival's sake, he has stockpiled an arsenal of destructive devices, from machine guns to shoulder-fired missiles. Years ago, he tried to storm the Hackworth Facility head-on; three Scavengers made it back alive, and he has avoided direct contact ever since. By his order, the Scavengers go out only at night, creeping through the piles of gadgets like mice at a great hall feast. Three families, many of them un-Awakened, live here full-time. I doubt if many of them have ever been to Earth, or even away from the Realm, Germano himself was born here. Lady Rivers would love to explore the logistics of a child bom in astral space, but Abraham distrusts the Verbena, maybe with good reason.

Ecology

Although the Realm boasts no indigenous life, the plants and animals the settlers have brought over with them seem to prosper well enough. Lady Rivers and the Historians grow their own food, and I assume that the Scavengers do, too; God knows what the Technomancers do. (In case you're wondering, no, I'm not going to tell you about my fellow Historians—a man has to have *some* secrets, you know!)

During the early years of the Technocratic assault, all the gardens, wells and food storage bins were destroyed to drive the other settlers out of the Realm. I suspect the survivors used magick to recreate their supplies, and they

hid their resources better after that. Occasionally, a Scavenger or Historian falls into the Hackworth Facility's tender clutches. When someone disappears, everyone relocates. It's only a matter of time before the torturers get the answers they require.

There you have it: a Realm of infinite inventions, spoiled somewhat by a would-be monopoly of Technocratic interlopers. I hope, Alexis, that this description encourages some of your readers to come visit us sometime. If nothing else, we could use reinforcements.

The Courts



*...godlike Shapes, and Forms
Excelling human; prince!; Dignities,
And Powers that erst in Heaven sat on thrones,
Though of their names in Heavenly records now
Be no memorial.*

— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

At the mid-point of the Spires, a host of magnificent Realms unfold to the Astral traveler. From paragons of beauty to totting pits, these so-called Courts provide homes for the higher orders of Umbrood — the Preceptors and Lords of Hermetic terminology who embody the old gods, the elementals who incarnate the forces of nature, and the demonic and angelic hosts who personify the ultimate evils and goods. Several "independent" Umbrood also make their homes in these **labyrinthine** corridors, carving out Realms which resonate in Awakened folklore: the excruciating playgrounds of the Hestilics, the jeweled gardens of Parmantha, the floating steeples of Aelida, the Gneech Kind's Court of Cormanath, and so many others.

Most Courts have permanent portals leading from their halls to Chantries on the Horizon, or occasionally even to Earth. The elemental domains send small gateways to the material world through large fires, deep waters, caves, forests, storms or molten metals. Thus, an astral traveler who meditates before an inferno can pass into the Realm of Fire if he has the skill. I knew an Akashic who set himself on fire to visit Huo the Flame Lord, preserving his mortal form with advanced magicks so that he'd have somewhere to come back to when he returned. Lady Aelida brings her visitors to her sky-Realm by pulling them through whirlwinds, so I'm told, and the mermaid Seline lures paramours into her undersea boudoir by diving with them into deep pools or oceans. Any way you go, it's easier to reach a Court through an Earthly portal than through the Spires,

The various Umbral Courts are far too extensive a subject for this book. We tried to fit them in, but could not do them justice within this small yet comprehensive guide. A friend of mine named Hapsburg claims to be working on a more detailed treatment of the Umbral Courts (tentatively entitled *The Mad Mosque*), but aside from referring you to the extensive Hermetic libraries on the subject, Dindaine and I cannot explore the various Courts in as much depth as we would prefer. Sorry, folks! {:-} Even so, I can offer a few brief glimpses into the Courts I've heard

about. They're not as extensive as I would have liked, but they're enough to give an Umbral explorer some idea of where he's going and what he'll find when he gets there.

The Elemental Domains

There's a lot of debate as to whether true elemental Courts exist at all. While Hermetic writ and traditional folklore describe the Court of the Fire Lord, the Sea Queen's Domain and other such Realms, the rales disagree about the details. I'm inclined to believe that there are regions set aside by certain elements and shaped by their influence; within these areas, powerful elementals and other Umbrood set up shop and declare their Realm "the Court of the Five Winds," or something like that.

Cosmologists debate whether the elemental Courts "belong" in the High Worlds or the Middle ones. A case can be made for either distinction; although it's hard to reach these Courts from the Umbra, it *can* be done, so they probably occupy that fringe area I mentioned earlier. You know, the one with the Pattern Webs and the Mythic Realms? Good, good. Okay, now, although the four Western elements seem to occupy larger regions than the Eastern Courts of Wood, Fire, Metal, and Water, each type of element — except Ether, which frankly bugs me — holds some sway in the High Umbra.

Each elemental domain radiates immense power, hewn from the prime essence of that region. The Fire Courts crackle with walls of flame; breathing here can blister your lungs unless you take precautions. The Air Domains ride on clouds, with walls of wafting mist as solid as steel to outsiders but ephemeral to the native spirits, like the caves of Earth (which may lie in the Shade Realm of Matter for all we know), the air itself seems alive with dust; visitors here feel the weight of solid stone bearing down on them, even in the largest caverns. The Metal Lands have a similarly claustrophobic atmosphere, but the air here tastes of molten iron, and cold steel clanks beneath your boots. I'm told the Wood Groves are just that — endless forests decorated with Chinese calligraphy and Indian batik, dotted here and there by harmony gardens. Beneath a bottomless ocean, the Water Courts present a problem to any visitor without diving gear or advanced Lite talents. Seaweed and shaped stone guide currents of water into "rooms" where elemental spirits drift lazily. All in all, the elemental Courts are exciting, if a hassle, to visit.

The following roll of important elemental spirit Lords and Preceptors comes from an anonymous source inside Horizon's Archives. It's not complete by any means, but can serve as a roadmap to travelers in the elemental regions:



- **Air:** Aga the Storm King, Bojjiro, Hekka No, Hebil of the Million Eyes, Pipasha, Zephra

- **Earth:** Brunjah the First Child, Lord Gorm, Gortak, Hagga Hath, Tazgool the Insane, Tsuchi

- **Fire:** Amma the Just, King Umo, Hakka, Huo the Flame Lord, Hi-Nagi, Salamander, Unm'ad, Zelya of the Cold Smoke

- **Metal:** Eiliah the Wise, Kamali Kayasa the Iron Lotus, Shiyu Kwan, Tetsu Ri, Lady Yablin

- **Water:** Bahari, Lady Persephora, Nepenthe, Kroshhak the Devourer, Lo Chinn, Seline of the Emerald Scale, Ushaai

- **Wood:** Gyani Chaya, Hon So the Wooden Dragon, Lady Kath, Peng Tsu of the Peach, Quiang Shouberi

Umbrood Realms

Various beings and races live in the astral layers. The homes they create have more to do with their essence than with a visitor's expectations. Like Horizon Realms, these Umbrood palaces are worlds unto themselves, with a fairly static appearance and certain laws they operate by. Note that these laws don't necessarily have anything to do with Earthly physics; in fact, most of them get pretty damned weird. Water running backward, reverse gravity (or none at all), detachable body parts, that sort of thing. He who makes the Realm makes the rules.

Many powerful Bygones escaped from Earth to the High Umbra during the end of the Mythic Ages; a few of them have been here longer than recorded human history. Some cultures called them gods while they walked on Earth, gods who disappeared as the classical pantheons arose some 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. Ch'shrinn the Bloated One and Sobk the Eater of Sins are some notorious examples. Other cultures know them as demons on the verge of the senses — Hestilics, Akaa and much worse. The mass exodus of the High Mythic Ages brought other refugees — dragons like Ik-Thazai, entities like Aelida, and many others. These powerful beings took shards of preexisting Realms and shaped them to their needs. Floating castles, spires made of solid color, gardens decked with human limbs... anything that might suit the discerning Umbrood can be found here,

Most Umbrood Realms either overlap into other territories, like Mythic Realms or elemental regions, or establish portals or gateways that pass directly to Earth. Reaching such Realms through the Spires is pretty difficult, though I've heard it's been done. If you're planning on crashing some spirit's dinner party, though, just imagine the kind of reception an angry Umbrood Lord can cook up to make an example of trespassers.

And speaking of receptions (pleasant and otherwise)...

The Afterworlds



Heaven doesn't warn me, and Hell's afraid I'll take over.

— pop slogan

So where *do* we go when we die? I've gathered a lot of answers to that one during the course of my studies. While the majority of my colleagues insist we are reincarnated (which explains those Nagging Nellies many folks call Avatars), some of them claim we have one shot and one shot only to make the most of our lives. In these pages, I entertain several possibilities: the Underworld described in Chapter Three, the Umbral Worlds mentioned in Chapter Two, the Well of Souls explored later in this very chapter... and the Afterworlds. Which one is the *real* end of the line? And is death *truly* forever?

Can we return from beyond the Realms of Death? Obviously, the authors of these various sections had to come back to impart their observations to us, so there must be some kind of escape. So is it *really* death when you can come back, or is there some other Afterworld that no one can record? And if so, where do all these Afterworlds, Underworlds and Otherworlds get their populations from? Sorry, no answers yet! I guess that without enigmas, life would be too boring for words. And besides, looking for the definitive answer to every question is the Technocracy's game plan, not ours.

I've asked an... acquaintance of mine to give us a tour of the Astral heavens and hells, I've had lots of questions about these compelling Realms, and while no one can offer a definitive answer about our ultimate destination, Otherworld explorers can take a few tips from one who's been to hell and back •— literally — and who has scaled the hills of heaven in his quests. Enjoy!

• Oliver Hodge

A member of the Celestial Chorus, Oliver Hodge Awakened in the late '70s, during the beginnings of the American Fundamentalist revolution. Although an ordained Lutheran minister, Oliver has dedicated his life to the Celestial Chorus and focuses on supernatural and Otherworldly conflicts. Those who meet him encounter a well-educated bearded man in his early 30s with a slightly overdeveloped sense of right and wrong. Oliver met Alexis Hastings in Washington, D.C. during a chance encounter at a coffee shop when he overheard a discussion about alchemy and offered his opinions, Hodge continues to correspond with Alexis in hopes of guiding her free spirit.

The Pilgrim's Passage

I've spent my life in pursuit of truth, and that quest has taken me far from the reaches of man. I have yet to find that which I seek, but perhaps my travels will be of value to other pilgrims.

In my youthful pride, I was great among the members of my Tradition. The blessed gifts of the Creator flowed freely from my fingertips and the power of my soul seemed to be the equal of all heretics, heathens and unbelievers put together. In my hubris, I took it upon myself to redeem those souls lost to us, and ventured into the dark lands of the Adversary himself. The Creator requires a heavy penance from those who defy His design.

In my foolishness, I attacked a group of diabolists in their Lair. Instead of slaying the corrupt ones, I kept their leader and forced him to summon his demonic masters. The demons came. We fought. They fled before the Creator's light. I followed through the Umbra, venturing farther through the mists than I had gone before.

My blood chilled and my breathing grew shallow, but I was not afraid. I had faced the illusions and tricks of the Umbra before, and nothing would trick me away from my appointed task. I would tear down the gates of Hell itself. When my vision darkened, I called upon my gifts to strengthen my soul. Armed with a shield of faith and magick, I endured numerous horrific obstacles.

Finally, I arrived in a dank and misty place with strange insects and spiders crawling over twisted trees. A wet chill penetrated the walls of my faith. A tunnel of darkness opened before me, a passage which recalled an illustration of the cave where Christ lay. Or was it a mind's-eye image of that first set of caves where ancient savages sought refuge? I cannot tell, even now.

That is how I began my first trip to the Afterworlds. That journey ended with my return to the Earthly realm and a promise to bridle my pride in the future. I do not know whether the places I encountered are the true heavens or hells of the Afterlife. I suspect that they are not, but the truth is not for me to know. It is my place to believe, not to question. The transient nature of the Afterworlds I saw makes them false in my sight. Afterworlds change over time, and I prefer to believe in a Heaven that is absolute and eternal.

To those magi versed in astral travel, the Afterworlds are deceptively easy to reach. Entering a near-death trance, either by approximating the physical state with drugs or by altering one's Life patterns, opens the way to the Afterworlds. As the body nears

death, the spirit seeks its destiny. By projecting the living mind ahead of the spirit, the seeker can find his natural destination — Heaven or Hell. Some magi of my acquaintance claim that Earthly portals lead to the Afterworlds, too, and I have heard accounts of gates opened by demonic hosts or rituals. Perhaps these other passages grant an easier access than death. I know not.

Part of the reason that I agreed to give my insights to this "travelguide" was to prevent the simply curious from embarking on such a journey. Afterworlds are dangerous, even by our Awakened standards. Although I know many readers will insist on making their own explorations, let me say that if these places are our ultimate destiny, you will know all about them far too soon.

The Nether Realms



These thoughts belong to Oliver Hodge, member of the Celestial Chorus, and none other. If anyone comes to doom from these words, let the burden fall on my shoulders.

The places that I refer to as the Nether Realms may have several other names. Some believe that I have found Hell, Hades, Gehenna, Sheol, Dis, the Dark Beneath the World, the Land of the Asuras... in short, the place where the souls of sinners or the weak go for punishment and torment. I do not agree with such thoughts. The Nether Realms are not the true underworld of almost universal religion, but dark reflections of our collective fears and beliefs about such places.

The Nether Realms are many in number, and each one takes its own form from the beliefs of those who have shaped it. There are Nether Realms for each major religion, and for each major aspect of that religion. Some hells abound with excruciations too complex to describe, while others recall the simple torments of flaying, boiling, burning and tearing limb from limb. The minds of Inquisitors must have flown to such Realms during the darkest ages past — or perhaps those same minds fashioned these same instruments of torture. One hell simply presented the damned with a blank and empty room in which to spend eternity. I have even heard of a Nether Realm that resembles an endless nightclub, only here the night never ends and the doors never open. Those who dance do so forever, and those who drink thirst for eternity. Some Nether Realms are abandoned, forgotten spiritual reminders of lost religions. Others are all too active.

My own visit brought me to the Caverns of Suffering, where the echo of hammering and the muted cries of the damned heralded my arrival. This hell seems European in its construction, but it melds so many common elements into a grotesque whole that I must assume that I ventured into some aspect of the truest Hell. Of course, I've heard it said that all hells lead to the one true Damnation. I pray I never find out for certain.

The Tunnel Downward

When a magus approaches the Nether Realms, she finds a tunnel leading down into darkness. Moss covers the rocks surrounding the tunnel, and dreadful smells rise from within. Sometimes, a great rock blocks the tunnel; other times, it lies to the side of the tunnel. If the tunnel is obstructed, only magick can move the stone. No amount of mortal strength can budge it.

Inside the opening, light awaits. As far as I can determine, the nature of the light depends upon the traveler who encounters it. I have found a candelabrum each time I entered the tunnel, but a one-time Virtual Adept ally of mine discovered a cigarette lighter. Regardless of its form, the light source always relies on a flame, never on a glowing fungus or electric bulb.

Remains of fallen guardians litter the tunnel. The broken collar-chains of three-headed dogs, the limbs of demons and the rotting bones of a serpent lie in mute testimony to oblivion, I don't know why all sentries have perished. Perhaps the traffic downward was too great to resist, and it trampled them all in passing.

The tunnel delves underground for what seems like an eternity. Each person remembers the trek through it differently. Some visitors notice paintings on the walls depicting bizarre rituals. Others feel a noticeable heat the further they descend. Many remember a moaning noise, but whether it comes from the wind blowing through the tunnel or from a sufferer somewhere ahead, no one knows.

Thick layers of cobwebs, illuminated by glowing fungus, obstruct the traveler's path. I have heard that brushing these webs cause a visitor to lose his memory. After passing through the cobwebs, the tunnel splits into several parts, forming a maze called the Catacombs. Lost spirits wander this great puzzle, desperately searching for a way to leave. A magus may use her Correspondence magicks to navigate through the Catacombs, but an easier method exists: Watch the flame from your light source while walking through the Catacombs. It will point in the direction that you wish to go. This knowledge makes a good bargaining chip in case you encounter spirits with any remaining sanity. As a general rule, however, avoid any being wandering the Catacombs. Most of them attack without warning or provocation.



The Caverns of Suffering

Should you follow my path, beware the watchmen who sniff like hounds through the Catacombs. Their home, the Caverns of Suffering, lies at the end of all the tunnels. The hammering of endless labor and the wails of the tormented drift outward from the Caverns, rolling off the tunnel walls like a peal of thunder. Inside, demonic sentinels sweep through grand Infernal chambers on ghastly errands. A traveler is best advised to douse her light source before they approach. In the distance, sparks from the hammering and taint gray lights at the exits provide enough illumination to continue onward.

Passing through the Caverns of Suffering is not easy. The floor is treacherous with crevices, sharp rocks, crawling insects and worse hazards. The smell here is more foul than the odors of Calcutta on a summer day, and a choking haze burns the eyes and throat. Gray light seems to dunce over scenes of torment as the lesser sinners endure infinite tasks and merciless overseers. If you would escape their fate, for God's sake, keep your calm. The taskmasters would cheerfully take a living visitor and put her to work in many unpleasant ways.

Our preconceptions of Infernal hosts lead us to see the denizens of these horrid caves as archetypal devils, but their Masters grant them forms as malleable as molten clay. While a handful of the creatures I encountered had red skin,

horns, bat wings, cloven feet and pitchforks, others appeared to me as spawn from ancient myth, fallen angels, blobs of darkness or spirits of death. The demons I have met here are not the rampaging hordes I had expected, but intelligent, malicious and cunning. Be as wary of them as you would of a Nephandus in your Chantry.

Even here, there are places to turn back. Niches in the Cavern's walls lead to other Realms, or to the endless maze some call the Null Zone [Editor's Note: See Chapter Two. —Alexis]. A Euthanatos I know claims to have fled with the souls of two friends. The chase was as torturous as the tasks of the damned, but they finally found a way out. Once past the Cavern, the demons did not pursue them. It was a long journey home, and the three carry eternal soul-scars, but escape does seem possible.

Most exits from the Cavern lead up to the endlessly overcast skies of the Plain of Penance, or Purgatory. Every form of human torture imaginable takes place on the Plain. I will not dwell upon those acts, but add only that the Caverns of Suffering seem tame in comparison. Mountains of coal and iron form a circle around the Plain. Several stark metal fortresses, controlled by demon lords, dot the peaks. From some towers, poisoned barbs ring screaming human hells at each hour. A few claim these citadels house opulent demonic courts with portals leading to the secret gathering places of diabolists. I know not, nor would I care to find out the truth.

The Deep and the Cathedral

A wall of iron, miles long and covered with spikes, surrounds the Deep, a great pit in the center of the plain. Infernal sentries stand watch on the battlements. If the traveler reaches a gatehouse, a demon warrior asks her business. These Sentries of the Deep demand the name and business of any would-be visitor. I caution you — if you would speak to one of the Infernal hose, do not give your true name! A descriptive moniker, such as "Talewinds" or "Shadespeaker" would be far safer to parlay with than any hint of your actual birth name, so long as it contains some element of truth. Once inside, the demons commission an escort to guide you. No one with an ounce of sense would refuse such monsters on their home ground. No one, of course, but a mage!

The Sentries of the Deep can, of course, be bribed. Favors, Talismans and the names of rival demons are the best currency for such deals. Money is worthless in hell, and demons spit hot, liquid gold into the mouths of sinners, but worthless trinkets on Earth may be valuable here. Carnal favors are often an effective but dangerous incentive, but pay this way at your own risk. A Cultist of Ecstasy I knew once seduced her way past an attractive demonic guard. Seven months later, his demon-child ate its way out of her body.

A demonic escort is no guarantee of safety, but the Infernal Ones do enjoy showing off their homeworld to the living. The opportunity to preview a traveler's eventual fate is often worth keeping her alive to see it and return later. As you go, the demon answers all questions in a friendly, mocking tone. Of course that bed of hissing coals is for pagans, that brass bull for unbelievers, that skinning post for wizards. Why do you ask? My own guide, a pustulent fellow named Brisbane, took special pleasure in bringing me to the Pool of Truths, where fanatics drown eternally, chained to their own beliefs. If you're clever, you can see which aspects of your person's ality could use "repair" in the tortures the demons preview. Perhaps that's the true purpose of the Infernal: not to punish us for what we did in life, but to reveal to us what we must change while we can.

A path winding down around the outer edges of the Deep extends to the Lake of Fire. Souls trapped here are flayed into imaginative shapes by Infernal sculptors, who then parade their handiwork across roads of razors or ride them into battle with other warped monstrosities. Blood-thirsty mortals end up here, tearing each other to bits in a cannibalistic frenzy. I've heard that living visitors occasionally end up in such battles as well; the Cultist I mentioned earlier lost one of her Chantrymates to the demonic sculptors. When she last saw him, he had been split into three writhing limbs, each adorned with eyes and rending teeth. She carried that image with her unto her own death.

Caves lead off from the downward path to other Nether Realms, including Bantu hells where man has no fire, Shinto visions of the maggot-eaten First Mother, Buddhist tests of light, and Zoroastrian bridges across eternity. I suspect students of such beliefs would recognize many images and symbols in these Infernal Realms better than I could. For my part, I looked briefly into each cave, then walked away and continued downward.

The journey into the Deep takes days. Each layer of the Deep feels more real than the one preceding it. The sounds of suffering are clearer. The ground feels harder. Caves along the sides of the circling road allow more opportunities to visit different Nether Realms. An escorted visitor remains somewhat safe, but a lone traveler becomes prey to all forms of Infernal attack. Cracks open at her feet, rocks tumble from on high, demonic bandits and nightmare creatures lie in ambush, and tempters cast illusions of safety just out of reach.

Finally, at the lowest level of the Deep, explorers come to the Lake of Fire. Despite the name and the eerie flames that flicker across its surface, the Lake is bone-chillingly cold. Its waters absorb heat, pulling it straight through your flesh even from the shore. I ran my fingers across the surface and pain raced up my arm, raking through me like frozen barbed wire. The Court of the Damned rises up from the center of this Lake, and a bridge of iron reaches from shore to the Court.

The Court of Damned is more of a city than a palace. Demon lords and ladies walk the streets, sometimes clad in still-living human flesh. Soul-slaves in iron masks tend to the wishes of their masters. Walls divide the Court of the Damned into different wards, each one reflecting the hellish vision of a different religious group or culture. I saw five, myself: a modern Christian hell, a Muslim brass oven, a Chinese slaughterhouse, a biotech amputation gallery and a room where blind people were tied to chairs and left alone. The divisions between the wards do not limit the travels of the Infernal denizens who move freely between areas; rather, they seem to provide a sort of zoo for residents of the Court.

Infernal architecture and artwork taken from the imaginations of Gothic horror writers dominates the Christian ward. An arena stands in one area where humans are slowly tortured and gladiators fight in bouts of pain, where the object is not to win or lose, but to cause as much agony as possible. Demons conduct unspeakable sexual acts in the streets, and tempters disguised as mortals lay siege to the damned.

It's a great relief to reach the Cathedral of the Fall, a towering citadel of breathing darkness. Walls surround the structure, holding back the noise and stench of the outer regions. Bamboo, concrete, brass, black marble, rusted steel and bone are only a few of the materials combined to make this living castle. The interior twists and turns in a surreal nightmare, and the endless halls seem to encompass the rest of the Nether Realms combined. I believe that most demons hold personal courts located inside the Cathedral, but I couldn't say for certain. Some sections of the Cathedral are pleasure palaces, while others we

sewers unfit for rats. An escort is essential if you desire (for some reason) to enter the Cathedral's confines. The hosts here are too numerous and too powerful to resist for long.

Most meetings of the Infernal hosts either take place in the Cathedral's courtyards—Halloween-inspired grounds of dead grasses and trees, surrounded by fog coated swamps and dark **jungles** — or in the grand ballrooms, where magnificent thousand-toot halls oversee dances from all human cultures. Exquisitely blasphemous artwork decorates every room, and achingly beautiful music pours from the throats of once-human instruments. It is, I must confess, an amazing sight, breathtaking in its perverse magnificence.

Inside the Nave, the heart of this obscene travesty, the demonic nobility of a hundred Nether Realms dress in expensive clothing from every time period imaginable. No suits of living flesh are permitted. Most demonic lords and ladies are attractive in a bestial, animalistic way. A few carry themselves with an angelic grace. Most fiends have an insatiable curiosity about anything new, and are quite polite toward newcomers. The games they play with living travelers relieve the boredom of their eternal lives.

I was unsuccessful in my attempt to confront Lucifer. Demons fill the Court of the Damned, but no one ever sees the Underlord of the Nether Realms, if, as many believe, an Underlord exists. The demons claim that the majesty of their Lord is too great for human eyes, or that he is too busy judging the right punishments for the souls of the unworthy. A line of beings stands in chains outside the Court of the Damned, so there may be some truth to these claims. Business with the Underlord of the Nether Realms must be conducted through well-mannered underlings with the tongues of serpents (literally and otherwise). Gates within the Cathedral lead back to the world of the living. The implications of such portals terrifies me — surely they provide our world with its endless source of evil.

Within the Court of the Damned, anything and everything is negotiable, even escape. Beware such bargains, however. The gifts of demons always come back to haunt you. If I escaped this deepest hell (and obviously I did so), I fear it was to provide later sport for my "bodyguards." I'm sure I will see them again.

Background

*Think you God built this place, wishing man ill
And not lusts uncontrolled or swords unsheathed?
Not God, my friend. The truth's more hideous still;
These halls were carved by men while yet they breathed.*

— Etrigan, "Down Amongst the Dead Men" (*Swamp Thing Annual #2*, by Alan Moore)

As impressive as the Cavern and Cathedral are, I cannot believe that all the sinners in history could fit within their expanse. Nor do I accept that our Creator would have decreed such a tawdry excuse for an afterlife, even for the

wicked. Thus, I must conclude that humanity's nightmares of eternal punishment and perverse pleasures created the Nether Realms. Both elements reshape themselves with each new age, adapting to the newest prevailing beliefs. Both elements carry the taint of the true Hell behind them, but provide only a shadow of that Inferno's true existence.

The battered scraps of old fears I have seen give credence to my theory. Abandoned ruins of Egyptian tombs and bits of Greek and Nordic myth lie cast aside in the Nether Realms, and the death gods of thousands of forgotten religions have fallen from grace. The current lords may slip as well, if God is willing and humanity is more set on self-preservation than annihilation. Even so, these Realms are no less dangerous for their human architects. If anything, their imperfect and transitional nature makes them more fearsome. God is order itself; humanity is vicious and capricious chaos.

The residents of these hells are not idle, either. They have been granted sentience and use it to prolong their lives. These demonic hosts harvest mortal souls to provide enough energy for these hells to exist without human imagination. I suspect that the souls I saw in torment there arrived through pacts or spiritual capture. I recognized three Infernalists I had put to death myself, and assume that all such bargains stock the Cavern of Suffering with playthings. Perhaps their eternal torment keeps the Netherworlds strong. If so, then providing the means to your own endless torture is a grotesque but fitting reward.

Places of Interest

I suppose that the entire Realm is of interest to morbid minds. I have already described several landmarks of my own visit—the tunnel, the Cavern, the Deep, the Cathedral and others. I never saw the folio wing locations myself, but my Ecstatic and Euthanatos sources described each one to me from their own journeys. As for myself, I hope never to add to my store of Infernal knowledge; what I have learned haunts me well enough.

The Library of the Damned

Located beneath the Cathedral, the Library provides access to nearly every book censored or destroyed by members of various religious movements. The entire collection of the Library of Alexandria fills one wing of the Library of the Damned. Diabolic guardians prevent visitors from taking texts out of the Library, but there are no limits to what the traveler may read while inside. The main study area recalls the style of old European university libraries, with hardwood tables and chairs. Ravens nest on top of bookshelves and watch readers. Many tomes bear curses or misinformation, so scholars should beware seeking too many answers from the Library of the Damned.

It has been said that too much information is a dangerous thing. The Library of the Damned, which uses the intellect as an avenue to steal the soul, embodies this concept. Like the Cathedral, the Library has many secret doors and unnatural twists and turns, making it impossible to determine the full extent of the lore contained therein.

The Forest of Thorns

Found past one of the upper caves of the Deep, the Forest of Thorns has trees made of a dark red wood with the strength of iron. Demonic orchards flourish in the forest. Naturalistic mages may find several herbs and plants of the Nether Realms which can aid their magicks, if they care to bargain with the Infernal powers which guard them. Ver-bena especially cherish a flower called the bloodrose, a rare magickal blossom which makes Life magicks easier to perform. Perhaps it leeches this energy from the souls writhing nearby, impaled on the thorns. The agonized Resonance my Cultist friend detected certainly implies this theory.

The Palace of Riches

The Palace of the Demon Lord Mammon rests on a cliff overlooking the Lake of Fire, a level or two from the bottom of the Deep. His estate boasts platinum walls, inlaid with rubies, emeralds and diamonds. Priceless artwork hangs from every wall. Lord Mammon claims that he possesses the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in his castle; the beautiful gardens of the palace could well be the lost Wonder of the World.

Unlike other Demon Lords, Mammon seems more interested in material power and riches than in souls, although one may just be the means to the other. He offers boons in exchange for information about Earth, and cements his "friendships" with valuable gifts. As powerful as he is, Mammon prefers mortal avarice to brute force. A soul which goes to him willingly is far more precious than one reaped from a cooling corpse. Never trust the gifts of demons.

The Dread River

Several rivers run through the depths of the Nether Realms; I suspect they may lead to other worlds in the Middle Umbra, and perhaps out into the depths of space, to the Realm called Malfestas [Editor's Note: See Chapter Five. — Alexis]. The largest such river, called Dread or Styx, supposedly runs from the High Worlds to the Low ones. I have not

traveled it to find out, nor do I intend to. Ferrymen, infernal creatures who resemble old men and women, conduct business on the river, and accept payment in many forms of coin. Once a bargain is struck, a ferryman carries his passengers to a single destination. The Cultist claims to have escaped Hell this way, though the price was high indeed.

Ecology

Dark entities of all descriptions, shapes, and sizes live in the Nether Realms. Some are wild elemental forces, while others are remarkably intelligent, civilized creatures who would make good companions if they weren't ineffably evil. Demons may be grouped into three basic types: servitors, tempters and lords.

Servitors are simple horrors intent on causing as much pain and suffering as possible. Most servitors rely on brute power to achieve their ends, but a few have learned a bit of subtlety. Each servitor wishes to be responsible for the damnation of a soul (perhaps to improve their own lot), but the blatant tactics they use to scare souls into corruption are unlikely to succeed. Travelers should respect servitors in the same way they would beware a dangerous animal.

Tempters are greater demons who actively work to corrupt and steal human souls. Like servitors, they enjoy pain and suffering, but they see it as a means to an end, not as the end itself. Tempters are intelligent, subtle beings who see stealing souls as an art form. They are exceedingly patient, willing to resist corrupting one person, in order to possess the souls of all of her grandchildren.

Lords are the most powerful of Infernal entities, commanding legions of tempters and servitors. Each lord has distinct abilities and a personality, reflected in his court. Certain sins and souls appeal more to some lords than to others. Intelligent magi will endeavor to steer clear of demon lords; most such creatures have held power in the Infernal Realms for centuries, and can corrupt a mortal with their very touch.

Paradise



*I never spoke with God
Nor visited in Heaven —
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the Check were given —*
— Emily Dickinson

After my Infernal journeys, I knew that my soul was in jeopardy, I could feel gloom and despair weighing heavily upon my shoulders. My faith was weak, wounded from battling demons and venturing to the false hell of the Nether Realms. Although I knew their existence to be a lie, their very presence cast the faint heresy of doubt upon me. What if there were no real Hell?

I resolved to search for Heaven. Although unworthy of entering Paradise, especially with my current crisis of faith, I suspected a shadow of that exalted place might exist in the High Umbra. If a shallow reflection of Heaven existed, perhaps it could heal me in some way from the curse of the Nether Realms.

I prepared for my quest with prayer, fasting and deep meditation. Giving my soul wings, I soared out from my body, focused on the ultimate reward. This is what I found....

The Gate

The Umbral mists parted to reveal a shining gate of molten pearl. A white glow emanated from the barrier, bathing me in comfort beyond words. Even so, a nagging

voice urged me to return to Earth. My time was not yet come, it said, and I nearly followed through and left the gate behind me. Yet I was resolute enough to defy the voice, and eventually placed my hands upon the Gate of Heaven.

As I reached out with trembling hands, naked in my astral form and aghast at my own temerity, a blinding light shone through the pearly bars. The bars themselves were cool to the touch, and I felt the comfort of salvation flow through me like a cold drink on a summer day. The light washed over me, but its power did not burn my eyes; instead, I felt the First Song rise like a voice inside my ears. As my fingers gripped the gate, cool hands touched me and shining figures moved within the light.

"What brings you to Paradise?" I felt the voice, male and female at once, like a soft caress. Even so, there was power in the touch, a power so great that I, who had slain demons, would not dare to defy it.

"I have wandered into the lower regions," I replied, weeping suddenly. It was a moment before I could continue. "... And my faith has been wounded badly by the journey," I finished at last,

"You may enter for a while," the voice assured as the Gate opened completely, bathing me in light so intense my astral hotly felt dirty in comparison, "but remember: Paradise is for the dead and the unborn, not for the living. You may heal yourself, but seek not to conquer, nor to remain." Nodding my assent, I entered through the Gate and stumbled through the heart of the light. I have no doubt that if I had lied or struggled, I would have been seared into nothingness.

The Pastures

A spring breeze, scented with blossoming flowers, greeted my arrival. Green hills gave way to purple mountains, and bright rainbows shone overhead. Luxurious trees offered shade from the soft sunlight, while small animals played without fear in the tall grass. In the distance, I saw men and women—some in simple white garments, others joyfully nude—talking, playing or walking hand in hand. A sparkling stream bubbled between the hills and a gleaming city glittered from a far-off hill. As I walked, a lion raised his head from the sunlit grasses while a small pup tugged at the great cat's mane. The landscape of Paradise awakened my senses, restoring me to a health and a hope that I thought had fled with childhood. Every scent, every sound, each touch is as clear to me now as it was that day. I pray I never forget each sensation's purity.

Soon, my body was redeemed. The scars, wrinkles and blemishes I carried even in my astral form began to vanish, replaced by healthy newborn "skin." My mind cleared and my perceptions flowed like a snowmelt stream, cold and clear across the landscape. A vitality I feared had disappeared with my youth bled through me, and soon my own voice joined the chorus of this sublime world. For the first time in years, I understood the true nature of my Tradition's Song; the magicks I had worked with its power had deadened me to the crystal nature of that Song's purest essence.

Another voice joined my own. It took me some time to realize it, and when I did, its source shocked me into silence. A nude and beautiful young woman stood beside me, her voice weaving into my own. When I realized she was there, I admit I clasped my hands across my privates and tinned away from her, ashamed, "What's the matter?" asked the girl. "Surely you're not going to tell me Paradise is improper!" She laughed, but her tone held no mockery.

"It just doesn't feel right," I admitted, "for both of us to stand here naked, *especially* in Paradise."

"Aren't these bodies gifts from God?" she replied. "Isn't it clothes that are the illusion, the comfort of mortal shame but an affront to Divine Grace? Let the mortals hide their souls from each other. Here, we have no need for shame. It's lust, not love, that is the poison of sexuality, and carnal needs, not spiritual ones, which profane our bodies."

"Those people over there," I noted, "are wearing clothes."

"It makes them feel more at ease. If you feel the same, we can take care of that," In her hands, a white garment appeared. She handed it to me and indicated the waters at our feet. I had not seen the stream a moment ago, but now it rushed along, clean and inviting. "Please wash up before you put these on," the girl advised, "You're still stained with the trials of Earthly life. Before you dress in heavenly garments, you should clean yourself in heavenly grace." I agreed, and did as she asked. No mortal bath ever felt so refreshing. When I had dressed, my guide led me across the fields to join the distant people. She introduced us all around, and we spoke of many things until dusk.

My companions were a friendly lot, gracious and happy. Although it seemed as though each of them had come from Earth at some point, none seemed to remember much about it. To them, life was a struggle, an endless test of faith, I gathered from our conversations that these souls were recently dead, or not yet born. Perhaps they came here through devout service to the angelic hosts, or by steadfast service to Divinity. Like the poor sufferers in the Nether Realms, there seemed to be too few of these blessed folk to account for the billions who have died. Although the hills and mountains seemed to go on forever, few signs of human habitation marked the landscape.

My guide (referred to by one man as "Kalina") disappeared shortly before twilight, promising to catch up with me in the morning. "It's only right," she said sadly, "that I should see you on your way when you leave."

"Is that the way of Heaven?" I asked. Admittedly, I was a bit petulant about it. The peace of the Realm was such that I never wanted to leave.

"It is for the living," she replied. "You agreed to that the moment the gates opened. One day is all the living are allotted in Paradise." She smiled at me, a radiant look that swept my disappointment away, "Most people never get this far. Be glad for what you've experienced."

"I am," I replied.

She clasped my hands between her own. "So am I." She left me with a kiss and drifted away as evening colored the skies.

The Twilight City

As evening came, the sound of bells drifted softly across the hills, calling us all to prayer. I followed my hosts to a small open-air chapel, a natural grove where fading rays of sunlight pierced the tree-cover, illuminating a wooden altar. We sang our prayers to a God with many faces and many names, a God who spoke to us all in It's own way. Our prayers asked blessings for the frightened souls on Earth and offered praise to the One above us who had granted this sanctuary. After a while, as dusk turned to nightfall, we rose and took up lighted lanterns from the grove. Carrying our lamps before us, we walked toward the city on the hill, still singing our praises.

The city on the hill grew in height and grandeur as we approached. The hill became a small mount and the walls and buildings of the city gleamed with holy light. Words cannot describe the city; dreams of Camelot, the New-Jerusalem, Ys—no imaginings can compare to the splendor of the sacred streets of the Paradise I saw. Buildings of all faiths, from mosques to temples to cathedrals to simple lodges, lined the grand avenues we walked, and the Earthly signs of city life — squalor, commerce, vice and decay — were nowhere to be seen. The city seemed to exist for two purposes only: to impress the eye and lift the heart.

Other people greeted us here, and beings of light, simple animals and bygone beasts of the kinder varieties. My hosts showed me around their homes, where warm light illuminated comfortable beds and reading rooms, and took me to taverns where the blessed gathered in fellowship, to laugh and share fine foods and drink. No drunkenness accompanied these revels, only the pleasures of souls who have tasted ambrosia. The food I tasted that night was the finest I fear I will ever know, prepared with grace and thanksgiving instead of pain or harvest.

Background

As the night deepened into dawn, I began to wonder at this endless pleasure. Was such bliss eternal, or simply a waystation between troubled lives? Was this a test stop, a wish-dream, or some shadow of Divine reality? I didn't dare to ask my companions, but I suspect they would not have known the answer even if I had asked. Perhaps it's better that way; Paradise is such an ephemeral concept that questioning it seems like violence.

Not that the Realm seemed frail in any way. Every now and then, I caught sight of some angelic guardian. While most resembled the expected cherubs and winged perfections, I occasionally glimpsed a celestial dragon or pure-white steed. A protective power surges beneath the placid surface of Paradise. I have no doubt that if any threat forced its way past the Gate of Heaven, it would find the mightiest angels arrayed against it. And, I suspect, a power that dwarfs the greatest archangel by comparison.



I saw a glimmer *of* that power shortly before I left Paradise behind. As the sky outside the tavern lightened into a mild blue, Kalina returned, saddened by her task but happy to see me just the same, "Please tell me," I begged after we said our good-byes to my companions, "what this Paradise is? Is it a confection of mortal faith, a shade of the true Hereafter, a spirit-home, or a waystation for tired souls like mine. Where have I been, and what do I leave behind?"

As an answer, she took me to a grand Roman temple at the city's heart. The air around the place seemed to shimmer with power, and light, like the cool blaze which greeted me at the gates, rippled in the center of the room. "Ask God," she said at last.

"Does God reside in this temple?" I asked, hesitant.

"God resides everywhere," Kalina replied. "This temple, those temples, in the groves, in the valleys, in the stream, the gates, the sky, the clouds. Each blade of grass, each atom, each drop of blood. Every molecule is God's domain, so question Him where you will."

"Where are we?"

Kalina smiled, "That is the question, isn't it? Remember how you came here. Some would say you never left your body, that all of this is in your mind. Others understand the astral ways, but would tell you that we're standing in an Umbrood's Realm. Maybe you're talking to a spirit-being, maybe you're standing in front of God's temple, maybe you're imagining the whole thing. And maybe there's no difference between all those options."

"Is it too much to ask to get a straight answer?" My voice was as light as I could make it, but my annoyance came through, I'm sure. Kalina laughed at me.

"If you must, then just assume I'm an angel sent to offer hope to mortals on this side of eternity. This Paradise is a shadow of a glory too expansive for the human mind to grasp, a shadow that's been fashioned from what mortal minds imagine Paradise to be. We stand in a drop of Heaven, a Heaven which extends in all directions, all ways, all levels of consciousness. Even in the darkest corners of the hells, Heaven waits. We Celestials serve that Heaven, and we wait in this Realm for travelers like yourself—the newly dead, the soon-born, the struggling visionaries and the faithful without faith. We have fought the Fallen hosts, we have walked with the faithful, and we wait on the destiny those greater than us will decide. By our example, you are empowered. By our existence, you are redeemed. How's that for an answer?"

"It'll do," I replied, as she took my arm and guided me out of Paradise.

At the Gate of Heaven, she clasped my hands: "The mortal world is a trial, a test which grows harder every day you live and ends with your departure. It's not for me

to say what comes after your death, but be rest assured it's not as bad as it appears from the ground. Have faith, Oliver, and come back again some day." As the light rose about us, she wiped away tears from my face, kissed me chastely but with great love, and faded away.

I awoke in my study, my heart lightened by my trip and shining with renewed faith. Even as the vulgar bashing from my neighbor's TV sent my nerves jangling, I had to smile. The angel's kiss lingered on my lips. All in all, there were worse ways I could have spent a day and a night,

Places of Interest

Although I never saw the following places during my brief stay in Paradise, I heard them discussed by my companions during that long and wonderful night. Perhaps you who venture there may behold the sights I could not see in my one short visit. Perhaps I myself will return to Paradise someday and see them for myself.

The Endless Ocean

The Endless Ocean marks the western edge of Paradise. The tide softly rushes over the sands and warm water swirls up around your ankles. Multicolored shells decorate the shoreline without any sharp edges to cut your feet. A mist hangs off the coast, obscuring the horizon. Dolphins play with sea birds in the water, inviting swimmers to join them. The coastline changes to high cliffs and picturesque wetlands if you walk far enough along the beach, and the breeze brings sweet cooling mist by night.

The Great Mountain

The Great Mountain stands inland from the Endless Ocean. Its peak rises up into glowing clouds, dwarfing the surrounding snowcaps. I'm told that the ruins of a great city, almost as grand as the City of Paradise, lie scattered across the mountaintop above the clouds. Kalina told me that the ancient gods of many pantheons once ruled over Paradise from the peak. They have since left with the coming of the modern religions, and may have founded the Courts that exist elsewhere in the High Realms. Off in the western sky, a glow shines over the ocean, visible only from the mountain. According to the angels, the true Heaven lies in that direction. None who seek it out ever return.

The Animals' Shrine

Secluded in a quiet grove, a rock shaped roughly like a four-legged beast stands alone. Tithes of flowers, foods and squeaky toys lie all around the rock. The spirits of dead animals come here to find peace and to remember those they loved in life. Many different animals live in Paradise, and some believe that Paradise is the true

afterlife for the spirits of beasts. One of my companions claimed that a young visitor came to the shrine and was reunited with her childhood pet, if only for day.

The Elysian Fields

Past the shores of Paradise, the island of Elysia rises from the Endless Ocean. The entire island is a large plateau, covered in rolling plains. Ancient Greek heroes compete in Olympic games while poets compose verses to honor the champions. Philosophers sit along the beaches, asking great questions of passersby. Hunters track lions and boars, bringing their kills back for feasting, only to have the beasts rise again the next day. Fishing boats set sail out from a small harbor in Elysia, seeking the setting sun. Where they go, no living person can follow.

Valhalla

In a northern section of Paradise, a great Viking hall houses continual feasting and celebration. Viking warriors drink mead and consort with beautiful Valkyries, Skalds warm the hall with their singing. These spirits are said to have survived a manifestation of Ragnarok when the Norse versions of the Nether Realms and Valhalla destroyed each other in a mighty Umbral battle. They give a wide berth to the angels, but graciously welcome all others to their table. A practitioner of runic magicks would find the wisdom of this great hall invaluable. Other such heavens exist in other parts of the Realm, Paradises out of Zulu lore, Islamic doctrine, Puritan ethos, and Native American hopes. Every faith, it is said, has its best reflection in Paradise, and each one is contented to leave the others alone.

The Epiphamies



...symbols are more than just cultural artifacts: in their correct context, they still speak powerfully to us, simultaneously addressing our intellect, emotions and spirit. Their study is the study of humanity itself.

— David Fontana, *The Secret Language of Symbols*

When your mind transcends concrete realities, you drift to the top of the Spires, to the Epiphamies where our most abstract concepts take symbolic form. It's important to realize that this is the most subjective layer of reality — literally no one sees it the same way. You will see it differently than your partners will, and all of you probably see something only vaguely related to the following sections. The descriptions we offer here (courtesy of Alexandre Calais again. Hi, Alexandre!) are one man's observations; they're somewhat accurate -- based as they are on universal archetypes — but not exact. If you want exact, go join the Technocracy or something!

As I've said before, most travelers will never reach this region—a region in name only. Between the Realms, nothing is solid; visitors swim through the void between instinct and consciousness, a misty netherspace shot through with colored mists, crackles of synaptic energy and currents of sound. Occasional clusters of sparkling dust give way to more lasting Realms; once there, your astral body attains a reflection of your true nature — not your social demeanor, but the person you actually are. This isn't a trip you should embark upon with other people unless you're ready to see them as they really are — and ready for them to see you the same way! In the Realms, the concepts take on an archetypal reality, and seem somewhat stable. Occasional winds brush past as un-Awakened people have brief encounters with advanced concepts. You could almost get used to it if it weren't for the odd Epiphlings that dart

all over the place, taking your measure and defending their territory. These concept-spirits are the only indigenous life-forms in the highest astral reaches — no human mind can stay here for long.

The Epiphamies range from the relatively solid Realms of Language and Government to the twisting logics of Fractal, Meme and Quark. Time eats its own tail, Music hums in a thousand separate keys, and Touch caresses your astral form like a bath of textures. These places grow more and more abstract until simple minds like ours can't even imagine them anymore. At that point, the ur-consciousness of the Oracles is said to take over. Me, I just want to come home and get a drink after a trip like that. Thinking too much makes me thirsty! :-)

Your narrator from this point on will be our friend Alexandre, See you next chapter!

So Where Are We, Anyway?

Good question. If you've achieved the upper levels of the Astral Umbra, you're used to questions. Which is fortunate; the Realms in this region don't work like any material world, yet they reveal themselves in forms we can all understand. Just don't get to thinking that you can measure what you see in human terms; these enigmas defy mapping or definition as much as the concepts they convey.

What do I mean by that? It's very simple: What is language, really? It's a series of sounds or lines that pass an idea from one person to another. The trick is that both people have to understand the concept for the message to pass between them. Ever try speaking Bantu? If a person speaking Bantu came up and asked you a question in that language, you probably wouldn't understand a thing he said. He spoke in concepts you didn't comprehend. Was he speaking a language? Well, yeah. You just didn't know

how to understand his concepts. So what is a language? It's a series of abstract symbols that present an idea to people in the know (we can expand "people" to "beings" if you wanna get technical. Animals, trees, even the winds *do* have their own languages, you know). So how does anyone ever understand anyone else?

Symbols.

Symbols are concepts that connect to other concepts. A raised fist. A drop of blood. A tear. These are common elements in our human experience. We understand what they mean, to a degree, because they relate to our experiences, and maybe to something deeper than that. Languages build outward from there.

And the Epiphamies are Realms of symbols in motion.

So what does that mean to you, O mighty walker of Worlds? Well, it means you're going to have to read the symbols to understand where the bloody hell you are. And you're going to have to realize that sometimes, the symbols mean something else, and go with the flow. Otherwise, you're screwed.

Alexis already described the void between concepts. It's cold and empty, yet neither of those things {cold and empty are concepts, which leads you to a

Realm. With me so far?). Archetypes spiral across this void, warping across each other like spots of oil in water, changing all the time. The Otherworlds are fluid in general, but the Epiphamies make them all look like blocks of stone.

Do you understand why so few people ever reach these regions, no matter how well they understand the powers of the Mind? Because the average person - hell, the average mage — is like a kitten on a keyboard. He can brush up against the keys, even push a few of them and make some noise, but he'll never play Beethoven's Ninth. Not because he's not smart, hut because he just doesn't *think* that way. No wonder we never see the Oracles. They're not like the cat's owner; they're like Beethoven.

All right, I'll stop talking in metaconcepts. Alexis asked me to describe a few of the Realms I've seen in the Epiphamies, and I will. I just wanted you to know why these descriptions are as brief and elusive as they are. There are no "ecologies" or "backgrounds" to these Realms, because they defy such classifications. They simply *are*, and may be really different when you reach them.

If you reach them.

Happytrails....



The Well of Souls

From the One Sound came the cave, endless, resolute. From its depths, the First Light moved forward, bursting through the rock like a howl. As the tendrils of First Being swirled about the cleft, Light and Sound coalesced into Solid, and burned from there across the void.

When humans searched for the cause of Soul, they came at last to the cave, where the Light licked and spilled from the darkness therein. At the entrance of the cave, they left their mark, a thousand carvings, signs and mosaics to mark the place where three became one. As they journeyed into the cave, they left impressions on the walls to guide them, to secure their places in this vast expanse. For the cave is huge beyond words, and the human mind quails before the thought of infinity. Some words, some marks must stand as testament that *we were here*. And so the carvings were left behind.

In the center of the cave, in a hollow so vast that cities, states, oceans could fit therein, whirl the Light and Sound and Soul in endless dance. Those travelers who come to the banks of the Well of Souls see the faces of all beings who ever were and ever will be sweeping across the ripples of essence, then disappearing, bubbling, changing. This is the Great Making, the Great Unmaking, the Alpha and Omega, the Om and the Ki. All that lives begins and ends in this place.

It's said that Akashic elders came forth from this Well bearing a drop of its essence, which they brought with them back to their greatest temple. This drop, they named the Akashic Record, and it preserves all the memories and passions of their fellowship as impressions and dreams. From time to time, others have tried to duplicate their feat, but have failed. The essence will not be contained except in flesh, and those foolish ones who have tried to bind Light, Sound and Soul into their mortal frames have been consumed.

The Fortress of Government

Upon an expanse of barren rock and stunted trees, the Fortress of our follies stands. A monumental castle of steel and stone, the stronghold of wisdom, force and greed surrounds a mountain of shit. Atop the stinking pile, hundreds of yards around, stands a perfect bush of white roses. Are the flowers worth the effort of attaining them? Is the Fortress needed? Who would pick the roses if they could, and what would happen if they did? Men have argued these questions for millennia. And, I suspect, they always will.

The River of Language

Across an endless delta, the words of living things trickled like liquid serpents. Some evaporated in the arid air and were not heard again, while others became the rainstorms which occasionally washed the plain. The language of the birds and the spirits wove the deepest creeks, but even they grew lazy when the words of the Wyck sprang from parched earth and streamed outward, from pools to overflows, from overflows to rivers.

Some say that Woman spoke the first symbols, that Man first wove them into marks, that both guided the course of the streams as dozens, then hundreds of rivers ran forth. Some rivers died in the delta heat, while others prospered and ran deep, reshaping the land and changing the course of lesser streams. They say the gurgle and the rush of the waters is the sound of words in flight, and that the banks they carve from the dead earth is the mark of every written note. Visitors here can drink the languages and learn them, if only for a short time. They can, literally, become drunk on words.

As languages grow and die, so too do the rivers they spring from. Now hundreds of shimmering courses offer themselves beneath the hazy sky: the dried beds of dead languages; the boiling rapids of slang; the deep, slow rivers of common tongues; the quicksilver streams of modern discourse. Beside them all, the communions of other creatures are as trickles to a torrent, and their sounds are drowned in the rush of human speech.

Common Symbols

Storytellers may want to be familiar with a variety of symbols before running a story set in the Epiphamies. The idea holds true for any adventure in the Otherworlds, but it's a must when the reality your characters visit is *made* of symbols. The listings below just scratch the surface of a few common concepts. For further reference, copies of *The Secret Language of Symbols* (Fontana), *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* (Cirlot), or both can provide endless sources of inspiration.

A hint for describing the Epiphany Realms: Let your players describe how their characters see the place. Give them a general description, then let them fill in the details. If they visit the Rivet of Language, for example, tell them simply "You stumble out onto an endless plain of flat land cut through with hundreds of rivers, ranging from tiny dried-up beds to raging currents. As you listen to the eternal chuckle of the rivers, you all realize that the sounds you hear are words, millions of words flowing by. How would your characters see the details of this Realm?" The answers provide food for thought, and may deepen the roleplaying experience by asking a player to see through her character's mind as well as through her eyes.

Colors

An emotional trigger, our sense of color transcends rational thought and goes straight to our deepest feelings. The richness we perceive in a world of endless shades may help us to appreciate creation's diversity — seeing things in "black and white" is often a drawback, especially for a mage. (See also the Lours in Chapter Six.)

- **Black:** Darkness, hidden things, that which we cannot easily see or understand.
- **Blue:** Peace, contemplation, infinity, comfort, a chill.
- **Gold:** Majesty, truth, divine light, wisdom, immortality.
- **Green:** Fertility, jealousy, life in positive and negative aspects.
- **Red:** Passion, anger, blood, lust, sexuality, sudden change.
- **Silver:** Enlightenment, vision, clarity of purpose.
- **Violet:** Love, devotion, royalty, passion balanced by purity.
- **White:** Innocence, purity, beginnings and endings (sometimes seen as the pallor of death).
- **Yellow:** Humility, wisdom (often weakened by mortality), betrayal, sunlight.

Elements

The forces of creation in motion, the elements symbolize those things which supposedly never change, yet provide the basis for change. All things, including physical, emotional and mental states, have been linked with the elements in every form of philosophy. Even modern biochemistry measures bodily health in fluid and mineral levels.

- **Air:** Life, intellect, wisdom, transition, feminine energy; turns to fury in storms, where other elements are united in anger.
- **Earth:** Loyalty, steadfastness, protection, fortitude, strength, decay, masculine energy.
- **Fire:** Illumination, wrath, purification, consumption, uncontrolled passion, masculine energy.
- **Water:** Nurture, flow, mystery, secrets, passage, feminine energy.

Shapes

Even infants seem to recognize the inherent power in shapes; they reach toward round things for comfort and stack angular items together to create new shapes. In sacred geometry, each shape has a spiritual significance which finds its way into architecture, art and language ("He's smooth, but really rigid if you know what I mean.").

- **Circle:** Eternity, the unbroken border, totality, union. Divided, it stands for discord or imperfection.
- **Cross:** A juncture of energies, a centerpoint, a focus, a place where different elements come together and unite.
- **Oval:** Nurture, the womb, the face, the egg from which things begin.
- **Pentacle:** Boundless unity, perfection of purpose, the binding of forces and spirituality together. Aimed upward, it symbolizes energy directed by constructive intentions; downward, by destructive ones.
- **Rectangle:** A square extended, yet imperfect, its symmetry thrown off to give it strength. Power, but unbalanced power.
- **Square:** Solidity, order, perfection of structure, balance, unity of the four elements.
- **Triangle:** The trinity of elements united; pointing upward, it represents male power thrusting toward the heavens; pointing downward, it becomes female power fertilising the earth, channeling energy from above.

Structures

Items of human construction, these symbols represent an imposed order either reflecting or struggling against the natural one. To people who dwell in buildings (in other words, most of us), structures represent stability at the cost of certain freedoms,

- Bridges: Transition, passage, crossing over obstacles. Bridges can be precarious, narrow or guarded to represent struggle.
- Castles: Order, power, repression. The larger the castle, the greater its threat or promise. Magic castles represent achievement and luxury, while imposing fortresses stand for imprisonment or withdrawal.
- Caves: The unconscious, the womb. Like the bridge, a symbol for transition, but more fearsome than most. The cave can close in on you without warning, and many threats lurk in the darkness. A feminine aspect of transition and initiation.
- Chasms: Division, vertigo, birth or consummation. Although it serves as a barrier on a journey, the chasm displays promise for those who explore its depths.
- Doors: Easy transition, blocked by will. To open a door takes a deliberate act; doing so places the voyager in a new place or state of being.
- Mazes: Confusion, trial, loss of identity, threat. A place of both transition and obstacle, the maze must be puzzled out. A traveler who cannot master that task may be trapped, perhaps forever.
- Tombs: These may be the earliest deliberate structures. Tombs represent a place where death is given its due, a gateway where the visitor gives up her body to die spirit.
- Towers: Aggressive will, pride, achievement. You don't have to be Freud to figure out the masculine aspects of the tower. Towers are impressive and occasionally fragile; to stand for any length of time, a tower must be sturdy yet flexible.
- Walls: Blockage, structure, protection at the cost of freedom. Walls can be ephemeral, like curtains, or impregnable, like vaults. Strong walls resist threats, but those behind them may never escape.
- Windows: Reflection, admittance, looking inward or outward without actually going through. A window lets in light, but works both ways. The larger the window, the more vulnerable the person on the other side.





Clark 96

Chapter Two: The Velvet Curtain

*The universe is the Practical Joke of the General at the Expense
of the Particular, quoth FRATER PERDURABO, and laughed.*

*But those disciples nearest to him wept, seeing the
Universal Sorrow,*

Those next to them laughed, seeing the Universal Joke.

— Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Lies*



As I said earlier, the Garou claim there are at least 13 Realms in the Middle Umbra. I couldn't attest to it myself, and I don't know of any mages who have been to more than nine or 10. It could be that the others will admit only Garou.

This is not my territory at all. Our Umbra expert will introduce himself, present you with a few theories about the cosmology of the Middle Umbra, and detail for you seven of the Realms he's been able to find.

— Alexis

- **Trevyn Terrasso**

Trevyn Terrasso felt compelled to crash a private meeting of Los Vatos Locos, a Cult of Ecstasy sect, in New Mexico. Luckily for Trevyn, they accepted the newly Awakened youth. Trevyn spends most of his time in the material world, wandering the Southwest United States searching for new experiences. In the Spirit World, he travels between Realms of the Middle Umbra, along with a few werewolf and Dreamspeaker allies, collecting odds and ends. Trevyn considers himself a philosopher.

The Middle Umbra, or Spirit Realm, reflects our emotions, our innermost feelings. It isn't a place of logic or contrived literary fantasies. The Spirit Realm offers a chance for travelers to connect with their true nature. Experiences in the Middle Umbra tend to be symbolic, almost dream-like, and if you hold your heart and soul open, you can find what you most desire there. The challenge comes when you try to bring it back.

Remember childhood? Everything was more vibrant and colorful. Days lasted forever. The facts of life were discovered using your hands and heart instead of your head. Traveling to the Spirit Realm, we can all rediscover the days of innocent bliss, except now the wisdom of experience aids our lessons.

The Umbrascape

Upon entering the Middle Umbra, be on guard for anything. Most travelers experience the Spirit Realm as a cloudy mist, brightened slightly by the sun during the day and illuminated by the moon at night. The mist thins out above your head, and the Umbral sky is almost always clear. In many ways, it reminds me of nights in the thick fog of San Francisco.

Most Umbral travelers are familiar enough with the "geography" of the Penumbra. Each thing appears as its spiritual essence; a peaceful glade resembles an idyllic fantasy grove, while a back-alley looks more like a Gigeresque vision of hell. From the obvious landmarks, the fog beckons you forward onto alien paths. These paths lead to Realms, each surrounded by a thin Gauntlet called a pericarp. Each Realm, in turn, seems like a world unto itself, bordered by mists but otherwise whole. To leave a Realm, once you've arrived there, you must find the mists that lead you away. Departing, in itself, isn't easy. Some explorers have been trapped forever in Realms they cannot escape.

Moon Paths And Umbra! Trails

Trails part the mists. Some of them seem insubstantial, glowing bits of light cutting through the fog, while others resemble more mundane forest paths. The trails may not appear as walkways; I've seen streams and mighty rivers

swirling through the fog. Funnel clouds, tunnels and the limbs of giant trees may offer passage through the Middle Umbra. Lachlan Thane, a Euthanatos, told me of a trail that followed the rotting spine of a long dead leviathan. Long-time Umbral travelers refer to these trails as Aim.

The safest and most direct routes through the Umbra are Moon Paths, guarded by Limes, spirits of moonlight and children of Luna. Although some supernatural creatures, such as werewolves, may easily access Moon Paths, a mage will have to bargain with Lunes to gain their favor. I've found playing riddle games and charades, or offering presents, such as moon blossoms or whiskey, pleases most Lunes. If the spirit offers passage on Moon Paths, a visitor should make certain to show a modicum of respect to other travelers on the pathways. Dangerous spirits avoid the Moon Paths; Airt wanderers aren't so lucky. Moon paths remind me a bit of a yellow brick road, I wonder if Frank Baum got his inspiration for Oz from the Umbra.

Pattern Webs

Knitting the whole mass together are ever-present Pattern Webs. Incarnations of creation's structure, these silvery wrappings run from the borders of every Realm in the Middle Worlds to the Edges of the High and Low Umbrae. Wild, unsettled areas have few Webs cluttering them, while "developed" places such as cities are literally choked with them. Although most strands of Pattern Web (not to be confused with the *Digital Web*, the name some travelers give the cyberspace Zone) radiate a faint glow, the bindings of corrupt or decrepit structures turns black and sticky. Stasis-spirits called Pattern Spiders scutter mindlessly across the Webs' expanse, always adding more. These spirits, which can grow quite large, offer another hazard on a wondrous yet difficult trip.

Threats

Dangers dwell along Umbral roads. Look for guardian Umbrood and lunar spirits to protect your travels. The Garou take many visionquests through the Middle Umbra, but the Changing Breed are a threatening enigma, much like the Umbrood themselves. Unless you know one personally, you should always avoid a werewolf's path. Of course, many other mages explore the Middle Umbra as well, including Nephandi and Marauders. Caution makes a strong walking stick.

Hostile spirits pose an even greater menace. The Umbrood have Charms and abilities on their home ground which can catch even experienced spirit travelers by surprise. Be careful not to offend Preceptors or Lords if you trespass on their territory. Knowledge and alertness, not force or power, provide the best defenses against the Umbrood.

The greatest hazard that travelers face, though, is the Umbral environment itself. Fragments of emotions and lost dreams float through the Umbral mists, in addition to any

number of things which no physical description can do justice. A fool who strays from the paths risks falling into an unknown Realm or Domain, or simply being lost forever in a spiritual fugue where the laws of time and space, as the Technocracy defines them, no longer apply.

The Umbra! Wind blows reality along with it, shifting paths and tossing travelers about like straw. I have never encountered magick strong enough to affect the Umbra! wind or the spirit storms that follow in its wake. If the mists start to swirl and darken around your Umbral trail, seek refuge. Any nearby Realm or Domain should serve as shelter.

Zones

As the Introduction explains, Zones are regions "between" the Umbrae, where different laws prevail. Even the most experienced Otherworld explorers are at a loss when explaining *why* Zones are, or even *what* Zones are. They follow their own physics, exist outside the "established" cosmos, and seem to represent realities altogether separate from our world, or even from the Three Worlds, for that matter.

Optimists insist that the Zones express nature's creativity; here, the possibilities aren't used up, but stay in constant motion. Most Virtual Adepts believe that the Digital Web is the new Earth, and they want to make sure that they get to it before the Technocracy sets it all in stone. More pessimistic travelers call the Zones, "the seams of creation," and predict that as the world continues to go to hell, that the Zones will grow wider and wider until everything else is sucked in to them and disappears. Both theories have valid points; the Zones are spreading, and have become much easier to reach in recent years. What this development portends, I'm not sure I want to know.

Reaching the Zones is often more a matter of luck than of intent. While some of them, like Maya and the Digital Web, are close enough to enter often and on purpose, the more esoteric Zones, like the Null and the Mirror, open only by accident. The Vistas don't seem to open at all; everyone I've ever talked to says you can see them but can't join them. In short, these regions are enigmas, even to the Awakened. Maybe it should stay that way. I guess even God needs His little secrets.

Maya, the Dream Zone

Also known as Maya, the Dream Realms, the Dreaming and a thousand other related things, the Dream Zone comprises a space where imagination creates floating Realms which bob through the Tellurian like soda bubbles. Most of these hubbies are small, and quickly pop when the dream is done. Others, fed by recurring visions or shared folklore, attain unusual size and permanence. The more people visit a given Realm, the bigger it grows until it "lodges" and becomes a part of the so-called Mythic Realms (described later this chapter).



The possible origin of the entire Middle World (do we dream up the Earth, or are we the dreams of the Earth? No one can give me a straight answer on this) might be traced to the Dream Zone. As I understand it, another author handles the Dreamtime in Chapter Three, so I'll leave it alone for now.

The Digital Web

What can I say about this Realm of shared consciousness that isn't common knowledge to everyone who would visit it? In this world of information made form, computers tap into a network so vast that even its greatest explorers haven't mapped it all out yet. I'm not sure they ever will — if the Zone comes from human imagination, and humans are constantly born, then the Digital Web is theoretically infinite. Each new mind makes the place bigger. At the same time, most cosmologies say the Web circulates inside the Horizon. That's a limited space — a really *big* space, but limited nonetheless. I don't know. All I do know is that there are several sources of information [Editor's Note: Digital Web and the Mage rulebook] which say more about cyberspace than I have space to do.

The Mirror Zone

To be frank, we haven't got the slightest idea what the Mirror Zone is, where it comes from, what it means or what its events mean to us. Travelers seem to fall into it, or be swept into it, without even realizing where they are or what they've entered. Suddenly, things just seem *wrong*. Only when the wanderer sorts out the problem can he escape.

The Mirror zone replicates life as we know it. As is often the case in the Umbra, our experiences seem to shape what we get when the Mirror Zone enfolds us. I looked up from my drink while resting on a Moon Path to find that my friends Sara and Ryk were making love like animals. Normally, they couldn't stand each other, and I hadn't seen any overtures pass between them. One minute, they were glowering at each other across the fire (it hadn't been a good day), the next, they were in each other's arms (and each other's pants). What happened?

Well, it seems I'd been carrying a torch for Sara without realizing it. Nothing had ever passed between us, either, but I always wanted her to make the first move. As we were sitting around the campsite, the Mirror Zone had crossed over us, or maybe I'd just leaned too far back and fallen into it. Anyway, the seeds of like and lust blossomed into a vision of Sara having sex with my best friend. Dealing with that event was going to be my problem.

I tried to ignore the... festivities... at first. What business was it of mine? As I shifted off into the shadows, my jealousy began to eat at me, and the sounds seemed to go straight into my ears no matter what I did to escape

them. Finally, I got up and walked over: "Um, guys, look, isn't there gonna be enough time for that later?" I know my tone was angry and didn't care. I mean, *I* was the Cultist of Ecstasy, for God's sake, and here Sara was with a guy she didn't even like. So I stood over the two of them and spoke my mind,

I'm afraid the details of that little speech are a bit too long and embarrassing to go into at length; when I finished, I looked down at their puzzled faces. Sara and Ryk were about a yard apart, fully clothed and totally confused. They hadn't touched each other, and were wondering what I was ranting about. "Well," Sara replied at last, "you could've just said something earlier," It took us all a while to puzzle out what had happened; somehow, my insecurities had manifested themselves as an all-encompassing hallucination which I had to confront to understand. That's what the Mirror Zone does — it sneaks up on you, turns your world inside out for a moment, makes you experience things that don't exist (but which relate to you in personal ways), and sticks around until you do something about what you see.

I've heard about Zone "moments" where dead enemies returned, where friendships went sour, plans fell apart and sudden illnesses ravaged the traveler or his party. The only way to make these visions go away is to stand up to them, deal with the situation, and put the pieces back together when the Zone fades away.

The Null Zone

Ryk called this Zone "Backstage at the Theatre of the Mind." I think he was right — these tunnels peeking out into other Realms resemble the corridors behind the storefronts of a shopping mall, or the backstage of a gigantic theater with a thousand plays in motion at once. From inside the Null, you can catch glimpses of the other worlds I mention in this chapter. Sara had another insight, one which scares the crap out of me. She says it's the womb of all creation, the place we all begin. God help me, I think she's right.

The Null resembles a damp, endless tunnel complex, humid and warm. Everything inside seems both terribly real and disjointedly unreal (as a Cultist, I didn't have a problem with this, but my companions did). No item of technology more sophisticated than a club works here, so Virtual Adepts should consider themselves warned, if they can find the place at all. Magick doesn't work, either. I've heard even faeries and vampires are left with only their wits for survival. Shapeshifters don't seem to be affected the same way, though — maybe it's some primal inheritance of theirs. Although the complex retains some technological features, such as doors, grates and vents, they may be metaphors for things we "see" but cannot comprehend.

Time and space are meaningless in the Null. The tunnels link every place within the Horizon (and maybe outside it as well), and a traveler can spend what seems

like lifetimes inside the maze and never age. That's pretty scary when you think of it — it's all too easy to get lost in here. I think these corridors might comprise what the Verbena call "the paths of the Wyck," the elemental routes which linked all creation together in the early days, I know some Umbral travelers walk out past the Horizon and into the Deep Umbral worlds. Maybe this is how they do it.

Entering this Zone is pretty hard. You have to concentrate on getting "backstage" while stepping sideways from the Near Umbra. This approach works equally well from any of the Three Worlds, so knowing this trick may save your life someday. Doing it is perilous, however—screw up, and they'll never find the pieces — and a lot harder than simply passing through Earth's Gauntlet.

I know of two ways to leave this Zone. The first is to Find a Realm and "step out from behind the scenery," as it were. Once you do, you're stuck — the Null closes behind you as you pass through. Wedging it open doesn't work — i tried. The other method involves stepping sideways again. It's as hard the second time as it is the first time, and just as dangerous, so don't do it unless you have no choice.

Vistas

As far as I can tell, these "places" aren't actually locations at all, but form giant "Umbral movies" of events totally outside your control. No one I've heard of has ever entered or affected a Vista, so I'm not sure whether to call them "Zones" or to classify them as another sort of thing entirely. Since classification is often a fruitless exercise in the Umbra, I'll just tell you what I know.

Vistas reflect a world in which something important has just happened. Some recount the beginning of time (which, from what I hear, different people see in different ways, from the Big Bang to the shattering of the One into Many to the first celestial battle which gave birth to the heavens), while others show you your own death, the Final Judgment (Apocalypse, Armageddon, Ragnarok, whatever you want to call it), or a world so encased by Stasis that nothing moves at all. As you can imagine, most Vistas are pretty upsetting to view; worse, there's nothing you can do to change them. They present their little vision and move on.

These Umbral landscapes spread across your entire field of view, as if whatever was happening was right in front of you. They seem more like events than like movie screens, and affect all a traveler's senses. The traumatic nature of Vistas often leaves you feeling depressed and drained afterward, as if everything is preordained. The differences between the visions, however, help to shake this fatalism. After all, each person sees slightly different things, and each Vista differs from the others. Maybe they're not really pasts or futures, just possibilities. Isn't that what the whole Umbra represents?

Realms

Fragmented planes and semi-coherent spiritual realities float through the Umbra much like drifting islands in a vast archipelago. If you search long and far enough, the Tapestry of the Middle Umbra reveals itself to be rich in spiritual Quintessence and spectacle. Almost anything can be found in the Middle Umbra, if you combine daring and willpower with the proper thoughts and feelings.

The Umbral trails and paths connect different landscapes, spirit-worlds and alternate realities. These places are much like Horizon Realms, but have a much stronger set of physical laws. Seven major "worlds" exist, although the Garou and other mages have made claims for the existence of others. I won't dispute what others have experienced, for I've found that all of us experience the Middle Umbra uniquely.

The seven locations in the Middle Umbra worthy of the title "worlds" are the Aetherian Reaches, the Chasm, Dystopia, Hy-Brasil, the Mythic Worlds, the Radiance, and the Wasteland. Each one has its own beauty and sickness, although I fear that more spiritual rot and corruption exists in these worlds than spiritual bliss. A Lupine shaman once told me of a hidden land in the Spirit Realm called SummerCountry, where all is happiness and plenty. If such a place exists, however, then perhaps unsurprisingly, I have not proved worthy enough to find it. Other worlds are rumored to exist in the Middle Umbra, but only the most spiritually oriented mysticks can find them.

These Realms seem to be the manifestations of dreams, or rather, the collective psychic residue of dreams. Thoughts, wishes, daydreams and powerful emotions mold *ephemera*, the stuff of the Spirit World, into Realms, Domains, and other regions in the Middle Umbra. Once enough psychic energy collects, the worlds take on their own life.

A Note About "Residents"

Like the Astral Realms and Underworld, some Realms of the Middle Umbra seem crowded with people; in fact, most of these folks appear to have been born to live in these lands, and don't seem to recognize that any other worlds exist, no matter how outlandish the place may seem to us. Where do these people come from?

The same goes for animals; most Realms worth the name have indigenous wildlife, often Bygones from Earth's past but occasionally creatures that never existed on our home reality (or at least, they never made it into the storybooks). How did these creatures come to be?

Unlike Horizon Realms, which usually "import" their populations or grow them in custom ecosystems, Middle Umbral Realms appear to have two kinds of inhabitants: Earth people and animals, and obvious spirits. The former are as solid as you and me, while the latter are made of *ephemera*, which only spirit creatures or mysticks can touch without magick. I have a few theories about the first variety myself:

- These beings are *all* spirits who have forgotten what they are.
- These beings come from Earth through their dreams and stay only for a while.
- These beings are the souls of dead people.
- Any or all of the above.

Any Umbra! traveler will hold forth on his or her pet theory for hours, citing this story or that event. Who knows for certain? I do not pretend that knowledge. I know only

that the beings I've encountered in the spirit worlds seemed as alive as any of us, if a little single-minded. Some seemed anxious to see the rest of the Otherworlds, hut most of them denied that anything of the kind was possible and refused **to** be proved wrong. Many of those I tried to bring with me simply faded away when we left their home Realm.

Maybe the same thing happens with people from our own reality.

Shall we begin?

The Aetherian Reaches



We can take a special pride in knowing that within each of us is the stuff of stars.

— Dr. Brett Chase, *Celestial Odysseys*

The Aetherian Reaches are easy to enter. If you can fly to the tops of the highest clouds in the Middle Umbra, you reach the sky realm. When your breathing becomes cold and refreshing, like after a long mountain run, you have found the Aetherian Reaches.

At first glance, they resemble some Hollywood vision of heaven: you're standing on white cloud, surrounded by knee-high mists with black starry skies or spectacular sunlit blue heavens as a backdrop. Looking in all directions, you'll see nothing but a flat plain of clouds. The ground doesn't feel solid. After a moment or two, you realize that's because it's slowly drifting, pushed along by the breeze. As you look up, you realize that there is a great deal more to the Aetherian Reaches than you may have first envisioned.

Description

The Aetherian Reaches encompass the entire sky of the Middle Umbra. This world is the domain of the Thunderbird, realm of the cosmic Sky-Father, starting point for spirit quests to the planetary spheres. When you turn your eyes to the zenith, you gaze out of the Middle Umbra into the High Umbra and whatever may lie beyond. The Horizon appears as a mighty double rainbow with sparkling jewels floating between the ribbons of light. The jewels are Horizon Realms, each one with its own facet and unique color. The panoramic view is crystal clear. Your eyes can see stars and objects that the most powerful telescopes on Earth could never resolve. Vision here is nearly a tactile sensory experience. A sense of awe comes with the territory; some folks are overcome by fear when they first look up in the Aetherian Reaches. I don't know who named it, hut I've always heard the upward view referred to as "gazing upon the soul of forever."

Cloud islands mark the domains of the Umbrood. Castles and mountain aeries rise from some of them. Several aerial totem spirits hold their own Umbral courts in the

Aetherian Reaches. Flights of whirlwinds and raptors patrol their strongholds. From what I've heard about the High Umbral Courts, these may be back doors into their domains. Then again, plenty of spirits make their homes in the Middle Umbra, too. I don't think any Realm has exclusive housing rights.

While all the spirits dwelling in the Aetherian Reaches can fly, most of us aren't so lucky. To rise into this wondrous sky, a traveler needs to grow wings or otherwise carry herself aloft. Befriending a cloud spirit provides the gentlest means of travel, although not the swiftest.

The Aetherian Reaches supposedly offer access to the three great Umbral Courts of the spirits. These Astral Realms — the Western Court, the Eastern Court and the Egyptian Court — roughly correspond to the myths of the cultures which spawned them. Although most mages miss the Aetherian Reaches on the way to the Umbral Courts, portals exist in the cloud Realm which allow direct entry into these worlds. I am all but certain that a fourth Court, the Lodge of the Sky, lies within the Aetherian Reaches, inhabited by pre-Columbian and ancient tribal spirits.

Background

A Garou shaman once told me that the Celestines, the mightiest of spirits, created the Aetherian Reaches as a border between this world and the Deep Umbra beyond the Horizon. When the physical world was torn from the Middle Umbra, the spiritual strength of many sky spirits anchored the world of the Aetherian Reaches, preventing it from sinking into the Umbral Mists. This legend seems plausible to the spirits which reside in the Aetherian Reaches.

Interestingly, I have heard that Technomancers of all types, even Tradition ones, are banned from this world. Maybe the spirits wanted someplace all to themselves, a world where the march of technology didn't clutter the air with flying machines and laws of mass and gravity. Explorers too wrapped up in their machines to notice the scent of pine breeze just seem to pass this place on by. No one with a jet pack ever flew through the Aetherian skies. Hopefully, none ever will.

Places of Interest

This Umbral sky is literally endless. It doesn't even stop at the Horizon, which cuts across the heavens like a translucent Dreamshell. Through this barrier, which Garou call the Membrane, you can see the stars and the distant Sun, *Anchorheads*, whirling masses of chaos, swirl into being across the Membrane and quickly fade away. Those who get their timing right can pass through and venture into the Deep Umbra.

The Planetary Spheres

Each planet in that sky has a spiritual manifestation; most of these, in turn, are supposedly governed by Celestines or other powerful spirits. I assume that these spirit-planets are the Shade Realms that other mages speak of [described in Chapter Five — *Alexis*]. I've visited the Courts of two such Umbrood, Hyperion and Phoebe (see below). I'm sure others like them exist, but reaching them involves a long Umbral flight into the eternal night sky. I'm not up to that yet.

•The Reaches

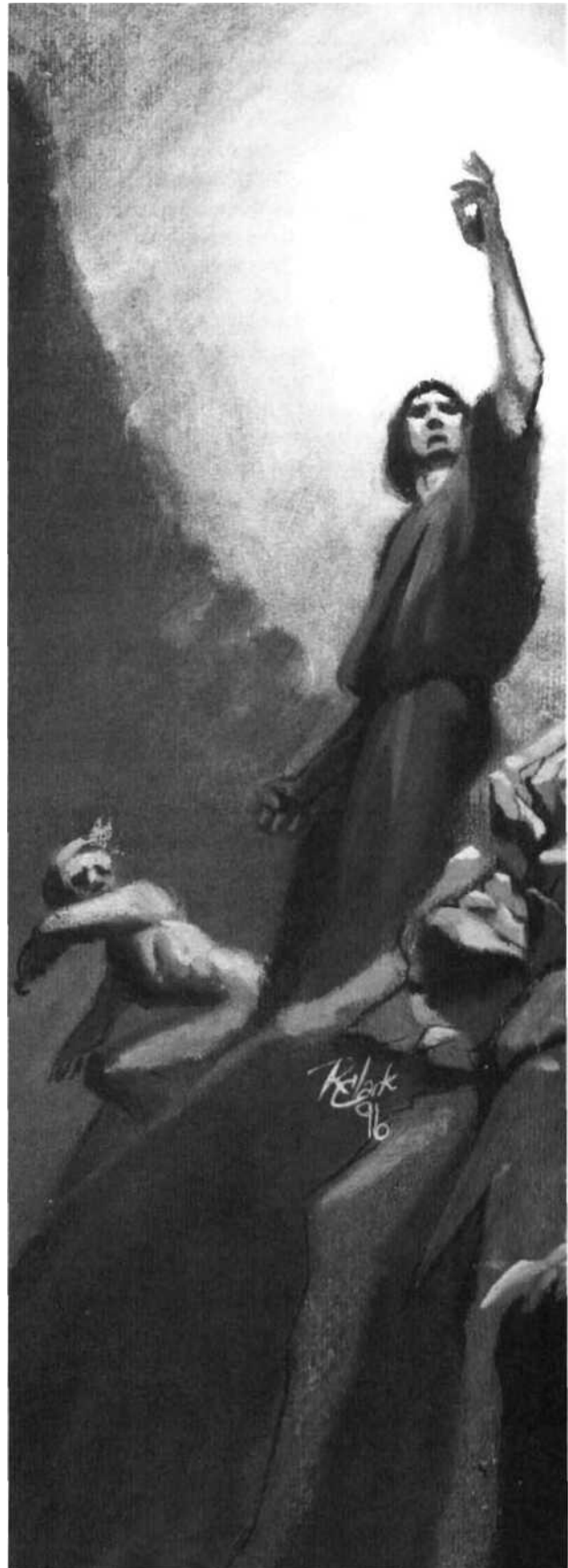
Along the Horizon, three patches of essence create mini-Realms called "Reaches." These Reaches seem to correspond to the metaphysical elements of Dynamism, Stasis and Entropy, although the Garou who know the Middle World best call them Wyld, Weaver and Wyrms. In the highest skies of the Aetherial world, these regions embody their "parents": the Wyld Reaches throb with constant change — nothing there retains its form for long. The Weaver Reaches resemble titanic webs, huge manifestations of the Pattern Web that binds the Tellurian together. The Wyrms Reaches are unspeakably hostile, floating hives of decay both spiritual and material.

All three Reaches pass through the Horizon, forming wormhole Anchorhead gates to greater Realms in the Void beyond, I've heard learned people call these greater Realms *Shenti* (see Chapter Five). No one I've spoken to has passed into these outer worlds, but I can imagine the journey would be hazardous in the extreme.

•The Citadel of Hyperion

I have, however, traveled to the Courts of the Sun and Moon, located on the Umbral Shades of their respective planets. Unlike their cousins, these Realms are inside the Horizon, not outside,

[Editor's Note: Actually, the Moon is located inside the Horizon, as is Mars. The Sun is quite outside that barrier, though, as are the other planets. The Fisher Princess does a nice job on those Realms in Chapter Five. Funny thing, though: the Moon and Sun she describes are nothing like the places Trevyn visited. Here's what I was talking about earlier, kiddies; visitors to the "same" places can have vastly different experiences. I've never been to either one myself, so I can't say. Hey, according to Trevyn, I couldn't find these Aetherian Reaches if I tried — I'm too into Science, I guess! Cheers ! — *Alexis*.]



The Umbrood Lord Hyperion dwells in a fortress of burning brass at the center of the Sun of the Aetherian Reaches. Fire elementals and solar spirits serve in various positions in his Court. Thankfully, the temperature within the citadel stays at an almost comfortable level. Elements of different human cultures decorate the composite court of Hyperion. Shields hang on walls beside Ionic columns beneath the vaulted ceilings of minarets. Hyperion himself has little patience for the curious, preferring to discuss only matters of extreme importance. However, he will grant an audience to anyone who has the perseverance to reach his citadel.

Lord Hyperion is a powerful and self-confident spirit lord who considers himself the last of the true solar deities. **He** desires worshippers, and cults of bronzed sun bathers appeal to him. However, Hyperion does not expect worship from the Awakened, only from the "unenlightened masses." Hyperion appreciates physical beauty and takes the material form of a handsome male, usually resembling an Olympic swimmer surrounded by an aura of fire. He enjoys intelligent conversation, but demands respect. Lord Hyperion possesses an unerring ability to discern between sincerity and flattery. Beware casual informality! Hyperion punishes those who offend him with permanent burns, which only the most potent Life magicks can heal.

• The Court of Phoebe

Phoebe, the Aetherian Moon Lady, attends and advises the Celestine Luna. The soft, cool light of the Umbral Moon fills her manor, illuminating graceful statuary and gardens. A faint blue-white haze hangs throughout her home, and sounds echo through the halls and fade in the gardens. Flashes of light through the windows indicate the

opening of the Moon *Bridges*, extremely powerful Moon Paths which connect sites back on Earth.

Phoebe treats most who come to visit her with the same respect they treat her. She typically appears as a veiled, well-shaped woman, but some say she often takes the form of an owl made of moonlight. Lady Phoebe commands the Moon Paths and Moon Bridges of the Middle Umbra, so many Umbral travelers desire her favor.

Phoebe herself seems to prefer fanciful dreams over empty flattery, and she encourages wonder among the humans far below. It's said that she herself touched the Earth with wonder when the Apollo spacecraft landed in her domain. Even so, she despises the Technocrats who have defiled the Moon's material aspect with their bases and training exercises. As I understand it, she feels the lunar landing was an act of pure wonder, while the earlier settlements were motivated by conquest. According to her, it was the Void Engineers who caused the Moon to wither into the barren rock it is today. Shapechanging cats and fae beings wander the Court of Moonlight, and they often harass the Void Engineers who treat Luna's body with such disdain.

Ecology

The most common inhabitants of the Aetherian Reaches are bird and air spirits. Mythical beasts, such as dragons and griffins, soar across the sky, and a palace of werewolf guardians sits on one of the highest clouds. Considering the number of Umbrood fiefs in the Aetherian Reaches, it should come as no surprise that almost every spirit here serves some Umbrood Lord or Lady. Like most places in the Otherworlds, a mage would do well to try diplomacy when encountering these spirits.

The Chasm



What seest thou else

In the dark backward abyss of Time?

— Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

I have traveled to the Chasm hut once, and it is not a quest that I intend to undertake again. Sometimes, memories of the Chasm wake me in the night. I will not return to it ever, at least not of my own free will.

Crevice and ruts in the Middle-Umbra's trails lead to the Chasm. These dark lines resemble the sort of cracks that children jump over on broken sidewalks or avoid stepping on in dried mud. The cracks and ruts grow larger as you approach this abyss. If you fail to find the Chasm that way, just travel randomly along pathways you do not know. This eternal canyon draws all lost things to it, even through the Umbral mists,

Description

The Chasm is *a* much a state of mind and being as it is a location in the Middle Umbra. The Realm that contains the largest known rent in the cosmic tapestry isn't much to behold. As far as the eye can see, plains of gray dried mud give way to plains of brown dried mud, except for the Chasm itself.

Running through the center of the Realm, the crack draws the gaze of any visitor, although it's not much to see. Perhaps it would be better to say that it's much not to see. It you look down into the great canyon, the void inside isn't dark or light. It just isn't anything. You'll feel it when you visit — a chill that starts at the back of your neck and runs down your spine and stops just below your breastbone. A reminder that we're all mortal maybe, I'm not sure. Something to let us know that in the business of forever, even reality may die.

The only sound you'll hear is the wind. You have to listen, but there's a faint whine as it blows down into infinity. Some say that if you listen carefully enough, you can hear it intensify, as if the entire Chasm were breathing. As far as smell goes, the air is devoid of any aromas except those you bring with you. The only scent is sweat, possibly mixed with the aluminum sulfide of deodorant or antiperspirants. You never realize how many scents carry in the air until you can't smell any of them. Even the dried mud doesn't have an earthy aroma. If you scoop some up in your hands, the dirt's just cold.

Even the climate offers no sensation; the Realm remains always just slightly cool. If you have two friends who argue about how hot or cold a place is, bring them to the Chasm. They'll both find it a little cool. Don't think about it too long or it might start to bother you.

The only thing that marks the Chasm are the paths down its sides and the crumbling stone bridge which spans one of the narrow parts. Do you want to know what happens if you take the paths down? Or what occurs if you dare to cross the bridge? Just so you know, most call it the Bridge of Despair. Few travelers have the strength of character to gaze down into the Chasm without experiencing intense feelings of hopelessness.

Five are the ways into the Chasm: the Way of Iron, the Way of Silver, the Way of Gold, the Way of Steel, and the Way of Soil. None are easy. Most lead only to death or corruption. The Ways of Iron, Silver and Gold lie on the near side of the Chasm, The Ways of Steel and Soil wind down into the nothingness on the distant side, and only those who first cross the Bridge of Despair may hope to find them.

If you go deep enough into the Chasm, your perceptions play tricks on you. The more perceptive you are, the greater your danger of suffering hallucinations, I think the Chasm affects the brain just as a sensory deprivation chamber does. Mages have less trouble with these hallucinations than do other beings, I've learned. In many ways, the Chasm helps a mage focus on his Avatar, or so I'm told.

I've wandered the dead plains for days and weeks on end, trying to find some other landmark, a habitation, a sign of life or spirit. No matter how far I go, I always return to the Chasm,

One last thing: magick doesn't work here, at least not reliably. I'm not sure why that's true, because it doesn't seem like Paradox interfering with my efforts. Maybe the Chasm just doesn't like us.

Background

I researched the Chasm in the archives of the House of Quodosch, but couldn't find substantial information, just a few naturalistic myths and some unfounded theories as to its nature and origin. The Chasm has inspired a library of vague and unreliable material. As with most mysteries, I suspect the truth lies somewhere between the myths and theories.

One school of thought about the Chasm (also known as the Abyss), maintains that the entire region is a manifestation of mankind's collective death wish. Considering the suicidal

effects it induces in visitors, I'm inclined to agree. An unsigned treatise that I discovered stated that the Chasm has grown considerably in size since the 1800s. I'm not sure I buy that, just because I think the Bridge of Despair would have collapsed if the Chasm got any wider. The counterpoint to my argument, of course, is that the bridge could grow with the Chasm.

Another idea bandied about in some discussions of the Middle Umbra is that the Chasm is where the spirit world is dying. One mage compared the Chasm's world to a malign spiritual tumor. As more spiritual energy fades from reality, the Chasm grows larger. The abyss replaces the Umbral mist.

The mythic cycles regarding the Chasm support two basic views: First, a being known as the Devourer lives in the spirit world dominated by the Chasm. The Chasm itself is just the maw of the Devourer. The tales I found say that a tribe of American Indians sacrificed themselves to kill the Devourer, but the monster's hunger is so great that even death cannot end it. The Chasm seems too eternal for me to believe this story.

The final tale states that the Chasm is the last remnant of the primal darkness before creation, and it leads down into the underworld. A funny variant that I found on this was that the Chasm is where God died. On further reflection, the variant's not that funny.

Places of Interest

•The Way of Gold

Of the Near Ways, the most treacherous is the Way of Gold. Sharp jagged bones of humans, animals and other things that seem to be neither human nor animal litter the path. Considering that the Way of Gold is only three to five feet wide, this debris becomes quite dangerous. The Chasm walls along the path glitter with gold and veins of gemstones. The material wealth here is so great, that even the greediest miser could fill his vault of fantasy. Those who pay attention to the patterns on the walls eventually recognize runes cursing those who steal from the Chasm. Travelers fluent in many languages report that the runes repeat the same message: "Those who take what belongs to the Chasm, leave themselves as payment." As the Way of Gold continues downward, breaks start to form, and gaps appear in the path. My thinking is that the Way of Gold ultimately leads to self-destruction.

•The Way of Silver

The Way of Silver has a strange significance to the werewolves that often travel through the Umbra. Some tribes believe that their ancestors passed through the Chasm along the Way of Silver. The path itself becomes a trail of pure silver, winding down into the Chasm. The going is not difficult, as long as an explorer keeps his senses about him. After traveling nearly a hundred feet into the Chasm, gigantic carvings and faces start to appear on the walls.



Many of the faces belong to beings out of ancient legends, such as cyclopes, gorgons, ki-rin, and men and women wearing ancient helms and headdresses. A few travelers refer to this place as "the cemetery of the gods." In the Umbrood Courts, a few pompous spirits claim their images have been carved along the walls of the Chasm as tribute. Other authorities maintain that the faces belong to those who've fallen to their doom within the Chasm. The Way of Silver has little to offer, just a few vague historical clues, reminders of times long forgotten.

• The Way of Iron

The Iron Way provides a wider, easier descent into the Chasm. Caves lie along the path tilled with both dangers and rewards for the courageous. Inside the caverns closest to the surface, a visitor finds only the remains of long-dead explorers and bits of debris, items lost in the Umbra and swept into the caves along the Iron Way. The deeper explorers go, the more intricate the cave structures become. About a hundred feet down, where light does not reach, the natural chambers and corridors grow ever more vast and interconnected. Living within these chambers are ancient mages and other Awakened beings driven mad by the Chasm. A few of them possess artifacts of power or Talismans salvaged from the upper caves. No one living has ever found an end to the Iron Way. Tales claim that it continues, growing ever more dangerous, down into oblivion. Madness lies at the end of the Iron Way — no one who stays in the Chasm long enough to find its end could stay sane.

• The Bridge of Despair

Like an enormous cobweb, the Bridge of Despair dangles across the Chasm. Enormous skulls and bones along its sides provide some semblance of a railing, but also add to the bridge's eeriness. A wind blows down into the Chasm, making a faint noise as it whistles along the bridge. Despite the sound, the breeze is so soft that you have to stop to feel it.

Every surface of the bridge has the same lusterless, gray coating. Upon careful inspection, I discovered that the gray substance was dust. Brushing it aside, I found bones jammed together. Once I realized what the bridge was made of, I could see the outlines of skulls and bones everywhere. A passage from Ecclesiastes summed up the bridge nicely: *Life is useless. It is like chasing the wind.* Images of death surrounded me. I felt a cold hunger fingering my soul. I crossed quickly.

The Way of Steel

I didn't spend much time on the Way of Steel. This path into the Chasm was quieter and less lifelike than the rest, which I found comforting. It seemed antiseptic, like an office building. The path beneath my feet was smooth steel, hence the name, and the wall alongside was flat, like machine-cut metal. After a while, I found a cave and entered. Stalagmites of lost umbrellas, car keys, socks and

other items reached toward the ceiling. I started rummaging through this discarded junk, not really knowing why. By the time I stopped, my eyes hurt and a day's worth of stubble covered my jaw. My life seemed meaningless; searching through these discarded items was all that mattered. It was like playing an addictive video game for hours and disconnecting from reality. Something within, perhaps my Avatar, compelled me to leave. I staggered out of the cave and climbed up the Way of Steel. That was the closest the Chasm had come to claiming me,

•The Way of Soil

The Way of Soil was the final path I found into the Chasm. A thick, dark loam covered the trail into the darkness. I walked down, unable to smell the life-giving odors that I associate with good soil, I didn't expect to smell anything. The loose soil made travel treacherous. Sliding off the Way became a distinct possibility as I continued into the depths.

Further down, I found large terraced ledges covered with dead leaves, yellow stalks and white roots. A faintly rose-colored blossom beckoned to me. I stroked the petals. They cracked like dry leaves, and some presence brushed me with a deep sadness. I studied some botany in my

university days, but I couldn't recognise any of the plants. The terrace continued as far as I could see along the sides of the Chasm. Looking out over the edge, I saw another terrace below, also covered with strange plants. Soon, I realized that the plants I saw were all extinct on Earth. I touched the needle of a conifer and a chill trailed down my spine. This was a graveyard of plant spirits. As the wind blew across the terrace, petals drifted in the air, fragments of some tropical flower, obliterated from the Earth at that very moment, probably a victim of rainforest destruction.

Ecology

As far as I can tell, a beast calling itself Nightmaster is the only permanent living resident of the Chasm. The creature dwells in the dark, and claws its way between the paths. I encountered the fiend once myself, and it threatened me with an army of dark servants. Roused from my depression, I attempted to kill the monstrosity, but from what I could tell, the beast cannot die. Evil has consumed Nightmaster, but I cannot feel anything besides pity for him. Lost spirits, most of which are quite insane, also wander the Chasm's paths, crevices and tunnels. The few I saw had twisted and rotting flesh, making their gender and species unrecognizable.

Nothing truly lives in the Chasm. Nothing at all.

Dystopia



Cities are the abyss of the human species.

—Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*

My information about Dystopia comes from a Virtual Adept, Daneel. She spends much of her time exploring the Digital Web Zone, but we met in Dystopia, where we were trying to avoid agents of the Technocracy. While I had wandered into Dystopia in the conventional way, she had taken the more commonly-traveled road there, a "back door" from the Digital Web, where this spiritual computer network meshes with the Realm. Werewolves refer to this entrance as the *Computer Web*, Entry into Dystopia is possible through any terminal in the Digital Web, and some Virtual Adepts take new members there for lessons of how not to let the Earth decay.

The routes to Dystopia have a modern feel to them. If you can find pavement in the Middle Umbra, follow it until you see skyscrapers all around you. A number of Formatted Sectors in the computer Zone [places where some mage or cabal has grabbed a bit of Net-space and changed it to fit their needs, — *Alexis*] access Dystopia; some Cybernauts seem to enjoy coming here for some hard-hitting R & R, and some Technocrats may use the Realm to indulge in fantasies their "Inner Circle" probably wouldn't approve of.

Description

Dystopia is a nightmarish world, a dark futuristic city (Or is it, in fact, the future?) that sprawls endlessly, broken only by a toxic lake or burning river. Pollution is ever-present, and the misery of the Realm's inhabitants is almost palpable. This sprawl has four layers: the Undercity, Old Town, Downtown and Uptown.

The Undercity, or the Pit, extends deep beneath the streets of Dystopia. Some say this Undercity is larger than all of the other layers combined. The trash from Dystopia's upper layers filters down here, where the stench of organic and chemical wastes assaults the traveler. Dying spirits and madmen share the sewers and collapsed subways with the Technocracy's mutant rejects and shuffling toxic monstrosities. Cults of diabolists hold perverse rites in the Pit, and Nephandi sometimes scour the Undercity for potential servants. None of the Undercity's denizens have any hope left. No Technomancer can accept the Undercity and remain devoted to creating the world his Union foresees.

Old Town covers the street level of Dystopia. The ground-level view looks like a war zone. The competing scents of burning paper, oil, urine, smog and cleaning fluid don't enhance the environment. Rats scuttle back and forth. Barricades of vehicle wreckage, rusted girders and assorted debris block the streets. Graffiti proclaims death

and despair amid offers of sexual favors. Sunlight trickles down through small holes in the overhanging walkways between the massive skyscrapers. Technological spirits and minions of the Technocracy stalk the streets.

Clusters of people survive huddled in the ruined lower floors of the buildings. A few wage war against the upper classes in the high-rises. These urban tribes have a strange belief system, equating material possessions and advanced equipment to Divinity, a religious conviction similar to the cargo cults of the South Pacific. Sons of Ether can quickly amass a following among them by demonstrating unique inventions. Old Town guerrillas fight to climb the "corporate ladder" up to the penthouses and roofs of the buildings, where corrupt Technocrats and greedy mortals make comfortable homes. Corporate overlords have sealed the stairwells and elevator shafts leading to Old Town, so terrorists must scale the outside of the glass and steel towers.

Downtown is the most inviting layer of Dystopia. All of the citizens walk along balconies and skywalks, purchasing advanced technology conveniences with identification cards. These cards serve as cash, identification and keys, and allow citizens to access the public computer terminals, located along every walkway, as well as the personal computers in their apartments. HIT Marks, and other more experimental androids, police Downtown. Perfumes fill the air, keeping the reek of Old Town at bay. They don't help much. Downtown looks nice, but feels sterile.

The residents of this "paradise" seem as bored as they are happy. Some Downtown citizens may help outsiders just to add excitement to their lives, but most of them prefer their daily monotony. Most citizens live only for advances in technology, for "new stuff."

The mind of Dystopia lives in Uptown. Mag-lev elevators provide access to Uptown from Downtown if you have the correct identification card. Guardian spirits called Attack Geomids (see Chapter Six) target any intruder they catch Uptown, calcifying their victims and taking them into laboratories to be drained of spirit essence. I know for a fact that Iteration X and the Syndicate have operatives in the higher levels of Dystopia who experiment on the citizenry. Rumors abound that a large Technocracy Construct i the Planning Commission Headquarters, is actually located in Uptown. This part of town offers more danger than information, except for the truly bold. In other words, if you want to brave Uptown, make sure you're willing not to return.

Background

Some say that Dystopia was once the spirit world of the perfect city, a spiritual dream of society's grandest goals. In ancient times, this world had different names, such as the Polis or the Mir. The Technocracy — or its fall from grace — changed humanity's visions of the cities of the future. Few visionaries subscribe to the ideas of garden cities of tomorrow any longer. As the Technocracy imposes its

edicts upon humanity, the dream of a brighter future through science crumbles. The declining quality of life in modern cities has transformed a spiritual monument to the best aspects of society into a testament to the worst elements of the Urban Age.

So where do the people in Dystopia come from? I think there's a dream-portal siphoning people into this futuristic nightmare. Dreamers who spend their nights in anxiety-dreams of work or urban sprawls may condemn their un-Awakened Avatars to life in this Realm. While most residents of this dark Umbra! world are spirits, I'm inclined to believe that the ghosts of dead workaholics also share Dystopia with the numb souls of internet addicts. After all, isn't it written that we inherit the afterlife we deserve?

Appropriately enough, the "soulless" Technocrats often travel here in their dreams. I'm sure that somewhere in Uptown (and, perhaps, in the Pit as well), a portal into the Dream Zone sends members of the Technocracy here. Maybe this is where the Static Ones have their own versions of Seekings, or maybe, as Merlin once said, it's just "a dream to some, a nightmare to others!" The Technomancers who visit seem divided about how to handle Dystopia. Reform-minded Technocrats fight against the corruption and filth to salvage the mega-city, while the Union's more corrupt agents see this spirit world as a testing area for new technology. A few members of the Technocracy have visions of Dystopia in their nightmares, but only a few Void Engineers openly admit that their spirits might travel the Umbra while they sleep.

Places of Interest

•Cyber-clinics

In Old Town, some spirits perform operations, grafting cyber-fetishes to willing volunteers. The major difference between these cyborgs and those employed by Iteration X is that the machine parts for Old Town volunteers have spirit energy. Technological spirits give their essences to bond with the volunteers. The Virtual Adepts and Sons of Ether who submit to these experiments seem generally pleased with these results — "Wow, dude! New cyberware!" - while Verbena believe that these spirit cyborgs are some kind of affront to reality,

•Rotwang's Garden

There are tunnels, littered with debris from HIT Marks and androids, that even the hardest survivors of Old Town avoid. These vents, warrens and drains funnel into Rotwimp's Garden, a Nephandi Labyrinth in the heart of Dystopia. Here, cybernetically enhanced Fallen Ones forge spirit-fetishes from the psychic remains of their victims. Each new victory warrants an additional piece of cyberware and a sickening victory dance.

The Labyrinth's extent and contents are unknown, but the spiritual strength of the hive grows with each day.

Soon, it may split off from Dystopia and form a Realm of its own. Old Towners have started believing that the Labyrinth, not Uptown, is the new heart of Dystopia. Perhaps this nightmare place within a nightmare city will consume its parent. If that is the case, may the Labyrinth choke to death in the process.

• The Computer Net

With the aid of technomagick, the computers in Downtown can open new gates directly into the Digital Web. Although I'd say it was highly unwise to leave your body behind in an Umbral Realm, Daneel says some Virtual Adepts do just that. Any immersion procedure that works from the material world supposedly works from Dystopia as well, and it's certainly one of the only places in the Umbra where you'll find a working computer.

Dystopia also has its own odd spiritual reflection of the Digital Web, a Formatted Sector called the *CyberRealm Computer Web*, which connects to the real Web Zone through a variety of access points — essentially gates between the two forms of virtual reality. From what Daneel says, these access points look like silver pools of light surrounded by metal coils. She claims walking through this way hurts like hell, but plenty of people do it. Once on

either side of the access, the traveler must use another portal to return to where she was or end up trapped.

Virtual Adepts say that entering Dystopia's computer web is like being stuck in a weird online service, while the Digital Web itself hooks you directly into the Internet. Repressive spirits — more Attack Geomids — haunt Dystopia's version of virtual reality, making it seem like an updated showing of the old movie *Tron*. Dark Umbrood who represent the spiritual nature of electronic life, such as it may be, also dwell in Dystopia's shadow web. These odd viruses damage the body like they chew up computer programs.

Ecology

Dystopia isn't much different from a science-fiction environment. The residents of the sprawl are typical men and women, even though some of them might not be "true" humans. Technology spirits with material forms run rampant in this Realm. In the Undercity, people grow slime, hunt rats and eat garbage. The residents of Old Town have bits of synthetic food to add to their diet, while Downtown and Uptown residents eat nutrient additives. Although the Technocracy creations running amok are the greatest threats to the population, many Undercity folk are dangerous in their own rights.

I~ly-Brasil



Surely the hum of wheels and clatter of printing presses, to let alone the lecturers with their black coats and tumblers of water, have driven away the goblin kingdom and made silent the feet of the little dancers.

- W.B. Yeats, *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*

Although I have encountered a fair share of changelings, I never completely understood the faerie folk. They possess a power over dreams which awes me. I feel that if we mages could understand the fae and their magicks, we could unlock many barriers along our Ascension Paths. I decided to seek out the faerie Realms of the Middle Umbra, and arrived in the world called Hy-Brasil, a domain of the faeries sundered forever from lost Arcadia, I'm not certain if Hy-Brasil even has anything to do with true faeries, or whether it's a dream Realm, a wish-fulfillment, or a trick.

To reach Hy-Brasil, concentrate upon the faerie folk. Recite ancient tales of the western fae and recall the legends of the Fair Ones while following the paths of the Spirit World. The Umbral mists sometimes part to reveal winding trails to Hy-Brasil. Wanderers who reach these roads often encounter minor faeries who often demand a toll before they allow a visitor to pass into Hy-Brasil. These tolls range from a handful of dirt to one's good sword arm. Sometimes it's best not to give them what they want.

Description

Hy-Brasil appears as a land of endless fantasy stories. Here, the seasons never change and day stands locked eternally in twilight. In the western half of the land, the sun sets in a midsummer sky. To the east, the moon rises, cold and baleful, over a midwinter night. The westlands have well-tended woods with little undergrowth. Trickling brooks flow down into fish-laden ponds. Gossamer waterfalls slip over moss-covered boulders by meres that reflect the unbroken blue sky. The western horizon glows with a rose-colored sunset. Occasional scenic manors and accompanying peasant villages break the verdant forests. Knights clad in silver armor and sunlight-spun raiment ride white steeds through the westlands, dispensing justice in the name of their lord.

The eastern woods are gnarled and dying. The pools are stagnant, and the mud-filled creeks ooze sluggishly past their banks. Dead leaves and brambles cover the forest floor. Thick cobwebs stretch across the trails. As visitors move farther east, snow and ice gradually cover the ground, making travel difficult. Ancient ruins covered in strangle vines rise from the forest, here and there, and monsters dwell in the east. Ogres and goat-headed men attack the unwary. Large serpents and spiders prowl through the upper branches of trees,



Two roads run through the land of Hy-Brasil, The first is a great Roman road cutting through the forest from east to west. The strongholds of the masters of Hy-Brasil mark its ends; in the west, the mighty Gateway Castle of Lord Lysander stands. To the east, the brooding Grim Fortress of Princess Mariana looms. At the center of the land, the main road intersects with a decaying old road traveling north to south. Traveling south leads to cliffs overlooking a great indigo ocean shrouded in salt mist. Bones of ancient and fantastic sea creatures and magnificent shells litter the sandy shores below the cliffs. The northern route eventually leads TO a great river, where a sign warns travelers to go no farther. Beyond that river, the road continues up into high-peaked snowcap mountains, where northern lights shimmer behind the peaks. Sometimes, travelers see giants moving among the trees or dragons soaring above the whitecaps.

Traveling through the forests, an explorer can quickly become lost; normal spatial relations have no meanings in the faerie woods. Correspondence magicks reveal that space functions in a capricious way in Hy-Brasil, and Time magicks are useless. If a traveler can make her way to Gateway Castle or the Grim Fortress, either of the masters of Hy-Brasil can grant immunity from this disorientation. Spirit magicks may help a traveler find the great road by locating the trails of spirits moving through the Realm.

Background

Untold ages past, the faeries created Hy-Brasil to serve as a buffer between Arcadia and the Middle Umbra. Lord Lysander, a true knight of the Sidhe, received the privilege of guarding the gate to Arcadia against all who would approach. Lysander's enemies in the courts of Arcadia were glad to be rid of the honorable warrior. Even so, Lysander swore an oath to defend the gate until the true king chose a new knight to relieve him.

In those days, the Seelie and Unseelie courts alternated rule in Arcadia. When the Unseelie court was in session, they sent Princess Mariana to the Umbral gate to serve their own interests. Mariana was a quick-witted, dark, beauty talented in the greatest magicks of the fae. Mariana was young for her ability, and elders, jealous of her imagination, tricked her into swearing that she would stay in the gateway Realm until she destroyed the Seelie Lord Lysander.

Both Seelie and Unseelie nobles established their own domains in Hy-Brasil, and soon began their war. Mariana sent monsters into battle against the silver knights of Lysander, and he, in turn sent his soldiers against her. After a few years of stalemate, the Shattering occurred, destroying the gate to Arcadia. Mariana, Lysander, and their retainers were stranded, and have remained so ever since.

The two nobles aged in soul and spirit, if not appearance. Their conflicts alternated between subtle intrigues

and vicious all-out battles, and their small Realm soon grew into the world I speak of today. Mariana and Lysander no longer seem interested in continuing the conflict, except to maintain appearances; indeed, rumors persist in both courts of a secret romance between the two.

Some dispute the story of Hy-Brasil. They claim that this world has nothing to do with Arcadia, but instead reflects the Dream Realms of the faerie lords, presenting a pale shadow of the beauty of Arcadia revealed in the Middle Umbra. Both the well-told story of the Gate to Arcadia and the reflection theory have merits. I cannot speak for the truth or lie of either. I know only the Realm where I have gone.

Places of Interest

•Gateway Castle

Gateway Castle appears like something out of a dream. Behind its battlements, the sun slowly sets, backlighting the white crenelations and highlighting the flapping banners and pennants. The stone-walled palace seems so fragile as its impossibly thin towers soar skyward, yet even Princess Mariana claims that no army can assault its walls. As far as anyone can tell, direct hostile magicks cannot harm the castle at all.

Beautiful gardens, hedge mazes, ponds and a life-sized chess board surround Gateway Castle. Silver knights continually contest one another at the grand tournament field behind the castle. Sometimes the dark knights and monsters of the Unseelie courts come to Gateway Castle under a banner of truce and tilt with Lysander's knights. If a visitor secures an invitation to a Grand Tournament of Hy-Brasil, she will have an opportunity to meet all the fair and foul luminaries of the land.

The Lord of this domain is an honorable man, if a bit stiff for a faerie knight. His manners are always perfect and his grace commendable under the circumstances. While others

in his position might become resentful or suspicious, Lord Lysander himself displays great generosity and hospitality. He does not, however, take well to insults or threats against Arcadia. Gateway Castle has dungeons for such offenders, and time passes very, very slowly in the faerie lands.

•Grim Fortress

Mariana's Grim Fortress looms over the Great Road. Spikes, skulls and gargoyles decorate black battlements and towers. Dark figures stalk the walls. Bats flutter around the highest spires, and the portcullis resembles the maw of a great beast. Bare thorn bushes surround the moat. Like Gateway Castle, the Grim Fortress repels hostile magicks. Here, Princess Mariana graciously receives visitors from the outside world.

A youthful woman of unearthly beauty, Lady Mariana welcomes visitors from the outside world with graceful good manners and feasting. Although her domain is an ominous shadow, the Lady herself seems grateful for new company and orders fine food and music for her guests. The fare seems a bit macabre — elegies and laments complement dishes of cooked war pig and spider pie — but most Hollow Ones will doubtless feel right at home. Lady Mariana hungers for knowledge about Earth and its faerie inhabitants, and she will gladly offer favors in exchange for gossip. Within her Grim Fortress, odd patches of beauty exist, such as sculptures, rock gardens and paintings. The eternal sadness of the land mirrors the dark appeal of its mistress.

Ecology

Creatures of fantasy dwell throughout Hy-Brasil: Dragons, ogres, orcs, and of course, faeries, just to name a few. Many of the western residents of Hy-Brasil are quite friendly, but seem set in their ways. Nothing short of an edict from Lord Lysander will prevent them from carrying out their daily routine. In the eastlands, the residents are hostile and suspicious, but appear more willing to deal with strangers. All of them fear Princess Mariana too much to oppose her directly.

Mythic Worlds



Do there exist many worlds, or is there but a single world! This is one of the most noble and exalted questions in the study of Nature.

— Albertus Magnus

Everyone who has ever traveled through the Umbra knows of the Mythic Worlds, Realms where legends still live and breathe, homes to our mythic histories and heroic archetypes. While each of the Mythic Worlds is its own separate Realm, numerous gates, Airts, and portals connect them all. In essence, each of the Mythic Worlds shares the same basic nature: each one portrays a

legendary time or event from the viewpoint of a single Earth culture, and embodies its greatest ideals.

In the early days of human culture, these Realms were few, and those which existed were fairly predictable. The confusion and revisionism of recent centuries, however, has multiplied the Mythic Realms beyond counting. In this "region" of the Middle World, hundreds of Mythic Realms, many sharing the same name but vastly different events, have come into being. Camelot is one such Realm — or rather I should say, one such series of Realms. For each tale of King Arthur births another landscape, each with its own versions of Arthur, Lancelot, Gwenivere, Merlin, and so

on. A modern traveler might encounter a dozen Camelots and never pass through the same Realm twice.

Because these Realms represent cultural truths (or icons, at least), most of them have avid defenders and vicious attackers. Once, a rabid hand of Tolkienites chased me from a rolling hillside with a wondrous forest at its foot; another journey brought me to a hopelessly decrepit bar where black-clad fans of a vampire roleplaying game sneered at me across their Rolling Rocks and Gothic jewelry. I mention these incidents to drive home a certain point: When you enter a Mythic Realm, you're trespassing on *somebody's* sacred ground.

Lots of people go to the Mythic Realms with an agenda in mind. The really dangerous ones include Marauders, Nephandi and Technocrats looking for a reason to their cause. Although the latter usually can't find the Middle Worlds because of their lack of vision, the Mythic Realms intersect with so many other Otherworlds that anyone who discovers a Moon Path might end up here eventually. Even ghosts occasionally wander through, if only for a night or two. These Realms straddle the line between dream and spirit form, so keep an eye on your fellow travelers, you never know what they might be seeking here.

Finding the Mythic Realms is often a matter of luck and fortune. As I said, dreamers often find their way here by default as they share someone else's visions. People searching for their heritage or ethnic identity find their way to one of the hundreds of Realms, an experience which can often become confusing to the deliberate traveler. Which vision of the Old South is the right one? The Ante-bellum romance version, where happy servants serve dashing young landowners iced mint julep? Or the tyrannical slave-state drenched in blood and sadism? Both worlds can be found, and both contain elements of the truth.

In short, you may go into the mists expecting to find the "real" Camelot, and end up strapped to a hot iron grating by Good King Arthur himself. Or wander into a Berlin beer hall expecting to find a rowdy group of Nazi bastards and instead discover a group of idealistic young men singing their national anthem. The Mythic Realms are a crapshoot, and you never know what you're going to see until you get there.

Description

Each one of the Mythic Worlds is a Realm unto itself. When a traveler arrives in one, he may find himself witnessing some historical moment in progress — Joan of Arc being fed to the flames, Heraklese battling the Hydra, that sort of thing. The Mythic World changes his garb and possessions into items appropriate to the legendary setting. Only magickal objects, such as Talismans

or Fetishes, remain unaffected.

Travelers can show up at any point in a legend, but usually find themselves fit the beginning. The story then unfolds around the characters, and they often take part. Those who join in the festivities generally have more fun. Once you join, though, you're in for the duration. No one who joins a mythic quest can leave before that quest is completed. Here the danger lies: although most items and creatures in the Mythic Worlds are just spiritual representations of legends, within the Realm they're as real as you are. Many tales suggest that if any true dragons still survive from the Mythic Age, some are hiding in the Mythic Worlds. The same goes for other Bygones.

For those who travel astrally, death in the Mythic Realms is not a lasting affair. This makes them really popular "vacation stops" for those with the knowledge and skill to get there. Astral travelers who die simply find themselves in the mists between worlds (a dangerous thing in itself), or back in their bodies with headaches that last for days. Umbral walkers aren't so lucky -- death here is real. If the visitor actually survives the quest, she ends up outside the Realm, standing in the mists with the feeling of having just accomplished some really great thing. Vast amounts of time can pass inside the Realm without making any difference outside; I remember joining a rumble in the aforementioned ugly bar; by the time I'd dropped my opponents, escaped police custody, found out who'd set us up, joined another gang, trashed the bad guy and taken control of the city, several days had passed. Outside the Realm, my friends were wondering if I'd gone off for a piss. When I tried to return to pick up the girl I'd grown close to during the adventure, ten years had passed inside and she was gone. Damn.

Background

Those who study the Dream Realms assert that each Mythic Realm was once a part of the Maya. Each began with a concept, a dream, and as that dream grew and was shared among many, the Realm grew into a huge mass which eventually "lodged" in the Middle Umbra, stopped floating, and grew heavy with mythology. In time, we have a Mythic Realm, a dream made solid by decades or centuries of significance. Even now, portals still link the Maya with the Mythic Realms, and many travelers enter these places without ever realizing where they are. To them, the visit is all just a dream.

In the modern age, many Mythic Worlds have started to break down. The Technocracy's efforts to kill mythic imagination have resulted in strange Realms filled with a patchwork of creatures from a variety of mythic cycles. Some say that Mythic Worlds exist today based entirely on fiction or even science-fiction. In addition, Marauders have fractured or destroyed

Mythic Worlds, either by returning their denizens to Earth or setting up strongholds in them.

Places of Interest

• The Arena of the Immortals

This mixed Realm is a huge contest field, extending as far as the eye can see. Heroes of different ages and cultures compete in a variety of contests. Jousting, archery, oriental martial arts, wrestling, running, almost every ancient form of athletic competition can be found. Unlike the stand-alone quests held within the Realms themselves, the games seem to be a place where everyone realizes that they're playing in an uber-game where many worlds collide. Travelers may join the contests, of course, and winners receive accolades and promises of friendship.

In the "clubhouse" — a rundown but spirited hang-out shadowed in perpetual twilight — there's a hell of a band that plays every night. I'm sure it's not *really* Janis singing backup for Jim while Moon, Sid, Jimi and Honeyman Scott keep time, but they sure sound good.

• Kun Lun: The Realm of the Mystic Mountain

I'm told that a whole Craft of Chinese wizards actually make its home in a mountainous region surmounted with a magnificent Chinese palace. In this Realm of classical myth, the Dragon Emperor guides a near-infallible court against the chaotic whims of the Monkey King and raging Mongol hordes. These wizards, if my information is correct, have portals running straight from here to their Earthly homelands, and possibly to the Underworld as well. I have no idea whether or not these guys have any connections with the Akashic Brotherhood, but they don't seem the type for me to ask.

Ecology

For the most part, these Realms pay host to spirits who incarnate mythological worlds right down to the last peasant and squire. Thus, each has its own ecosystem, one which may not actually function by Earthly standards but works well for the inhabitants. Most Realms also play host to Bygones and Marauders as well as dream-travelers who have taken their fascination with an icon to such extents that, for a while at least, they live in it.

The Radiance



There is no metaphysical, super-ordinary, final, absolute reality.

—James Burke, *The Day the Universe Changed*

Rumors have always abounded about a Realm of raw magic, a place of primal power. Many wizards have spent their lives searching for such a world, pursuing random Airts and making attempts to map the Middle Umbra. The ultimate goal of these lifelong quests for the "Realm of Power" is the Radiance.

The Radiance defies easy description or easy naming. Some call it the Flux Realm; others refer to it as the Wyld Realm or the Primal Chaos. My favorite term for the Radiance is the Pool of Resonance, a name I learned from a Dreamspeaker friend. This may be the place where "free Quintessence" goes when it has no Pattern to fill. Cosmologists claim that the Radiance Realm leads to another, larger manifestation of Dynamic energies out past the Horizon. If it does, I'm not sure how to get there or return. The energies of the Radiance are powerful enough to disorient or even dismember most Umbral travelers.

I've found that scanning for Prime and Spirit energies combined helps you feel your way to the Radiance. When your senses go totally haywire, you're almost there. An entryway to the Realm itself can take any shape or any form, so it's easiest not to *look* for an entrance, just trust in finding one. Travelers with a

structured mindset, who believe the world functions in one particular way, must break their thoughts free before they can reach the Radiance. Few Technocrats, if any, ever locate this Realm.

Description

Initially, the Flux assaults travelers with an overwhelming sensory display. Silk caresses, tearing spikes, raindrops and flaming embers pour over your skin. Nightmares and daydreams come to life, and swirls of color and mad morphing shapes caper before your eyes. A cacophony of voices, sound effects and harmonious songs rise, fall, mix and clash in your ears. One moment, a traveler smells roses, the next moment, burning rubber makes him choke. His tongue can't tell whether it tastes mint or vinegar. The sensations are different for every individual. They change randomly, usually after an instant, but sometimes linger for hours. During the initial overload, even the mightiest wizards stand paralyzed, overwhelmed by sensation. My fellow Cultists seek out the Radiance just to feel the impressions at its rim.

After moments or hours — who can tell? — the sensory assault ends. The landscape of the Realm pulls back, leaving a sphere of stability around the traveler. This stable area resonates with a mage's essence. For example, a wild and lonely wood may surround a Verbena, while the interior of a grand cathedral might surround a

member of the Celestial Chorus. However it appears, this area becomes a place where the traveler feels at ease.

The *Thought* Anchor, as some call this surrounding sphere, moves with the explorer as she crosses the Realm. Thought Anchors of mages with strong Avatars encompass more area than those of weaker travelers. Environments may overlap, creating a mix, blending elements of both Anchors or shifting the environment to a place where both individuals feel at ease. For two mortal enemies, a mutual sphere might be a battlefield, or a pub where they both like to drink. Awakened lovers create romantic fantasies. Groups with vastly different philosophies, like Sons of Ether and Dreamspeakers, tend to get separated as their "pockets" pull away from each other unless some strong emotional tie overcomes their philosophical differences.

The Anchor reflects the mood of the person generating it. A mage who uses magick here resonates his emotions more strongly throughout the Anchor than one who does not, and his temperament can even affect the surrounding Realm. Anger or rage will cause objects to break or even catch fire. Fear will create shadows or summon nightmares into the Anchors. The effects vary from person to person, but often influence every Thought Anchor in the area. Thus, the safest way to travel through the Radiance is with a cairn and peaceful mind.

The Landscape beyond the stable surroundings of the travelers shifts and changes, molded by flows of raw Quintessence. Space, laws of physics, the normal constants of daily life have no meaning to the Radiance. Those who look around the Realm may see ribbons of color and strange floating islands, reminiscent of some Steve Ditko Dr. Strange landscape. They may also appear to be walking through a New England countryside. Mages strong in Correspondence often get a complete head rush when they use magicks to comprehend the spatial relations of the Radiance. From what I've heard, it doesn't work, but it feels really cool to try. A structured comprehension of the Radiance seems impossible, but some travelers can, over time, develop an intuitive understanding of the "geography" of the Radiance.

There *are* some solid places in the Flux Realm - towers or monoliths that float through the Realm, No one will say what dwells in these structures. Nexus points where streams of magickal energy rush into each other provide spectacular displays and opportunities for mages with Prime to harvest Quintessence from their overflow. Portals to other places in the Umbra stand in the Radiance, seemingly unaffected by the chaos around them.

After spending some time wandering through the Radiance, many mages experience visions of their Avatars. The Anchor shifts slowly over as the wizard moves, becoming less secure and reflecting her deeper innermost thoughts. Those who shift off into their own worlds fade from their companions' sight, often to reappear later with strange stories to tell. This vision, not the seas of Quintessence, is the true wonder of the Radiance — it provides an opportunity for a mage to travel through his own mind.

Background

Some believe the Radiance is the last frontier of the Umbra, a Realm of the unshaped and unmade ephemera, untainted by the thoughts and dreams of Sleepers. Others say that is a remnant of the Chaos from which all things were formed. I think it's a kind of "recycling pool" for Quintessence, myself.

The most common tale I've heard is that the Radiance is where lost dreams, forgotten wishes and failed passions are recycled. The Realm's energy comes from all living things, and from their experiences of the world around them. In many ways, it is a pool of Resonance, shaped by whatever passions and events stir its waters.

Places of Interest

Caves of Memory

Mages who enter this series of caves beneath the "ground" discover their Anchors expanding to fill the underground chambers. Memories from their past then play themselves out within the Anchor, often providing a traveler with a new perspective into events she previously misunderstood.

The Pulse

Nine streams of magick pour together in a single nexus, creating the Pulse. As the streams interact, the Pulse vibrates, giving the site its name. My friend Sara calls it "the Heartbeat of the World." Any mage who comes within hearing distance of the Pulse feels a surge of Quintessence burning the Paradox out of her body. It hurts like hell — I felt like I was being boiled alive when it happened to me -- but when it's done, all Paradox energies you might have built up within your system are purged.

Ecology

No spirits seem to live in the Radiance, except for those formed from the Resonance of travelers. If any entities are native to the Flux Realm, they don't make their presence known to strangers.

The Wasteland



It is useless, useless, said the Philosopher. Life is useless, all useless.

— Ecclesiastes 1:2, *Good News Bible*

There are wounds that time does not heal; we just learn to live with the scars. Many of us have well-scarred souls, and we seem to take pleasure in showing off our pain at parties and gatherings to attract attention. Others of us hide away from it and deny its existence. Either way, the pain stays with us.

The Wasteland is a place of healing, a Realm where victims and victimizes can confront their actions and their guilt. In this region, pain is real, fresh and new. It cannot hide from you, and you cannot escape its touch. In the Wasteland, the soul that can't let go and forgive itself can pay the ultimate price, yet still come out on the other side.

There is no path to the Wasteland. Those who hide agonies in their hearts will stumble into the Realm eventually. The Wasteland opens itself to the scarred and long-suffering. Death is the only way out of its embrace.

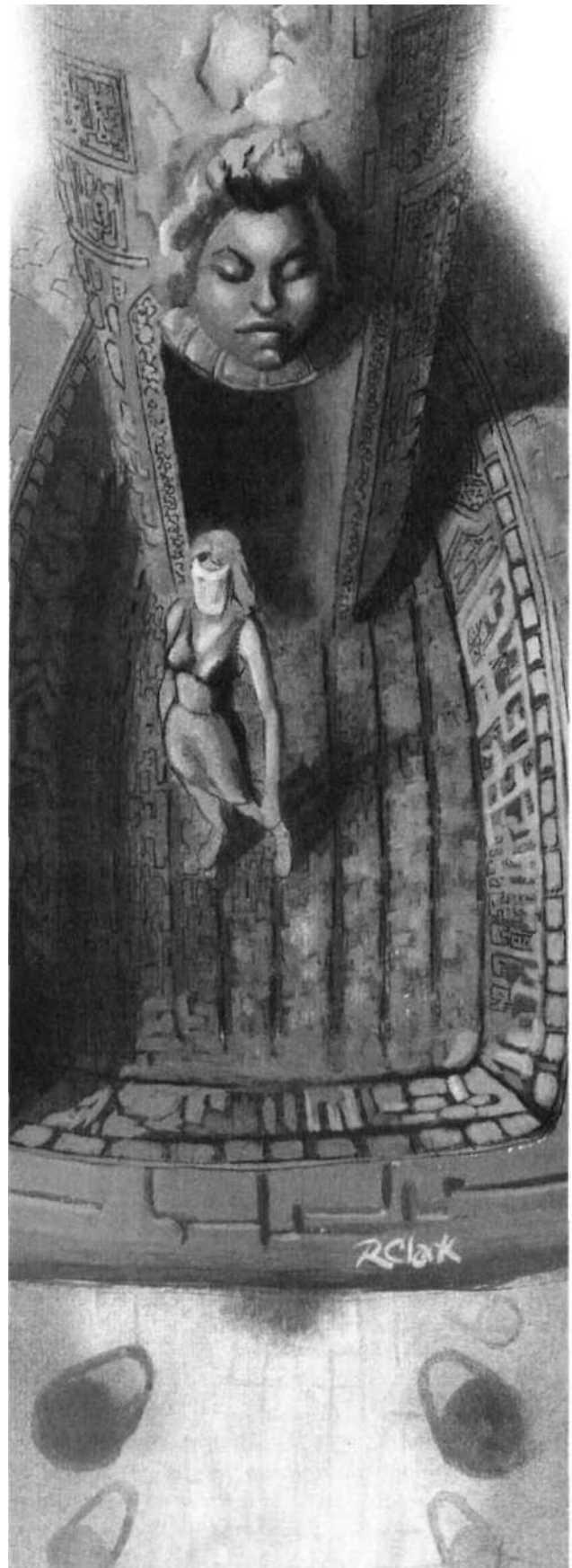
Description

Most travelers who fall into the Wasteland don't see much of the scenery. What little they do see, isn't worth looking at. The Realm consists of muddy hills with dirty vegetation, old trees, vines, lots of undergrowth, and an eternal cold drizzle. Half-buried bones jut from the mud, marking the tops of mass graves. Overhead, a queasy dark cloud of smoke taints everything with the stench of burned flesh. Some travelers have walked through a parched desert, but they say the smell is even worse in [hat part of the Realm,

Any group which enters is separated; each must deal with her pain alone. An explorer may shout, scream or even call out magickally to others, but every person in the Realm perceives herself as totally alone. Until the visions come...

In time, the traveler who wanders through the Wasteland sees mirages forming around her. As she watches in sick fascination, phantoms replay atrocities from around the world, both large and small — genocides, mass rapes, child killings, mass destruction, even the end of the world. No matter what she does, these phantoms ignore her, although some other Awakened creatures, such as the Garou, claim they can interact with the participants.

The traveler is in trouble when haze or steam forms around her, and solidifies into a scene wrenched from





her own soul, into something in her own life she hasn't yet come to terms with. She may be the victim, still wondering where to place the blame for her early sexual abuse; she may be the victimizer, still agonizing over the death of an innocent or an enemy. Whatever its cause may be, the incident comes alive again in the Wasteland,

What happens, and how it happens, depends upon the traveler. Only two things are certain: she won't be able to control her magick, and by the end of the scene, she will die. She may be killed in retribution for her action, or she may sacrifice herself to protect another. Once she dies, she leaves the Wasteland, and reappears in the Umbral mist. The pain of her death and experiences may linger with her for a while, but the deeper pain, the agony of that unhealed wound, will still itself in time.

Background

Most mages believe that their Avatars lead them to the Wasteland when there's some conflict which must be resolved. After a few failed Seekings or

internal arguments, the inner self basically grabs the Umbral explorer by her proverbial lapels and drags her into this unhealed scar, where she can't leave until she confronts the problem. Once some accord is reached - - and it's often a painful one, so be warned — the conflict often works itself out and the healing begins. From there, the Path to Ascension becomes a bit easier.

The Garou I've spoken to claim the Wasteland, or Atrocity Realm, is a creation of the obscenities humanity inflicts upon itself. If that's true, there's even more we can learn there, lessons that go beyond our own limited sphere of experience and reach out on a more global level.

When I last entered the Wasteland — and I hope never to return, trust me — I saw visions of the early Ascension War, of a long battle between Hermetic wizards and a group of Christian mages bent on burning them for witchcraft. It's easy to see how you could say these early Choristers were in the wrong, but watching the shadow-play, I was struck by how arrogant and careless the wizards themselves were. They

sacrificed grogs and peasants to fuel their magicks, and tossed around spells that upset the ecological balance, causing earthquakes and thunderstorms as if those events affected no one except their enemies. I understood then something I hadn't grasped before: We all set things in motion that no one can control. Those

things usually come back to haunt us later, and if we're not careful what we do, or how, those events may bring disasters we never want to face. Sure, it's no fun to second-guess yourself, especially where magick is concerned, but the price we pay creates a wasteland — not in the Umbra, but on Earth.





Chapter Three: Enigmas

Don't do it, Eleanor told the little girl; insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again; don't do it; and the little girl glanced at her, and smiled a little subtle, dimpling, wholly comprehending smile, and shook her head stubbornly at the glass.

— Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House*



Ah, ha! My turn again. In this chapter, you get to read all about the most mysterious Otherworlds, the places only the boldest and bravest set out to understand. If you're willing, if you dare, gather thy courage about thee like a cloak and hold it tight. Forsooth! The deepest riddles of the Otherworlds await naught Kit thy spark of knowledge, thy pursuit of understanding to unfurl themselves before thee... but they await also thy fear and hubris, so to consume thy very essence.

Just melodramatic enough, don't you think?

Briefly put, this chapter concentrates on Realms which don't fit into simple categories, or abide by simple laws. All of them can be perilous to travel. Each "type" abides by its own rules, which are not the laws of the Umbra as a whole. Leave your preconceptions at the door.

- Shadowlands

As long as we're being spooky and talking about cloaks of courage, why don't we stop by the Shadowlands first. Never having been there myself, I can't tell you too much. Those who study them say that the Shadowlands are similar to the Penumbra. The Shadowlands supposedly reflect physical reality as seen through the musk of death and decay. Not being one much for death and decay, I don't find this a very appealing place. Nonetheless, we are trying to produce a comprehensive travel guide here, so we've called in one of our panel of experts to introduce you to the place.

- Paradox Realms

I sort of feel like we're touring the dungeons of the Umbra. That's pretty much what Paradox Realms are. If you violate the laws of static reality too often, the reality police

send you here, locked away until you repent and perform enough community service to earn yourself parole. From what I understand, Paradox Realms are rather frightening things. I've been fortunate never to get Paradox spirits so upset with me that they've felt the need to put me out here. If you are a had little mage and unravel reality enough that it wants to send you to your room, just remember you're there as a punishment. You are being punished for using magick, so don't try to use magick to get out. I hear it's one of the worst things you can possibly do.

- Maya: The Dream Realms

Do you dream in color or black and white? Well, no matter, all dreams exist here. Stop that snickering, you. Yes, even the Sleepers' dreams are here. Many Sleepers contact the spirit world only through their dreams. And yes, if you

have the skill and the desire, you can even go mucking about in other people's dreams. But that wouldn't be a very nice thing to do, now would it?

- The Hollow Earth

Dinosaurs and sabretooths and mammoths, oh my! Welcome to the fabled Hollow Earth. Incredibly, even many mages don't believe this place exists. A land of savage tribes and enlightened monks, extinct creatures and some just plain really odd things await your discovery. If you look carefully and luck is with you, you might just find one of the cryptic pylons that some of my fellow Etherites claim are traces of an ancient, advanced civilization. Just be careful while you're looking. Ending up as a meal for a hungry sabretooth isn't going to help you find one.

The Low Umbral Underworld



*Death hath a thousand doom to let
out life;
I shall find one.*

- Philip Massinger

You have not walked the paths that I have. Few can claim to have seen the marvels and terrors I've known, for I have traveled to the very heart of the lands of the dead, and returned, a living man, to tell my tales. It would be best if you listened.

An introduction? Of course, I forget my manners. You may call me Aliksandros, after one of my countrymen, long dead. It is not my real name, of course — real names have power, and I see no need to give you that power over me. As for my profession, I am a humble student of the paths of magick followed by the Euthantos Tradition. I am also a tale-teller, an explorer, and when the occasion permits, a little added momentum on the great Wheel of Being.

Tea? Ah, a cultured soul. A cup awaits you on the tray to your left; sugar, milk and lemon are provided should you wish. Drink deep; listening is thirsty work.

The Names of the Underworld

Ghosts are real. That is the first lesson you must learn. Ghosts are quite real and dwell in a Realm a half-step away from ours. Others call the Lands of the Dead the Dark Umbra, or the Deadlands, or other, similar names, but to most who have lived and died under the consensual reality of the West, the afterlife that ghosts share is simply called the *Underworld*.

Of course, there are those who have died in other places, with other beliefs and other expected destinations. Thus is the afterlife divided into so-called "Dark Kingdoms," though this is a name applied by outsiders. The western Deadlands, also known as the Empire of Stygia

(after its capital city) is also known as the Dark Kingdom of Iron. The Deadlands of China are called The Dark Kingdom of Jade by outsiders, and the Yellow Springs by those who dwell within. And so it goes throughout the world, as ghostly mapmakers and semanticists argue over what should be called what. Unlike most things in the Underworld, in this case the perception matters little.

The second lesson is that the Underworld is like nothing you, I, the Technocrats or any religion in the history of thought could possibly have imagined. Your Christian Heaven? A version of it has been built in the Underworld, perhaps several versions, but as for an absolute, perfect Heaven? It doesn't exist. There are but two absolutes in the Underworld: Transcendence, by which certain souls... move on, and Oblivion, which my Tradition calls the Great Unmaking.

Instead of absolutes, then, there are layers. The lands of the living, the "Skinlands," are something but a few wraiths can touch. A Shroud of fear, disbelief and barred then stands as a wall between the Skinlands and their overlaying, ghostly counterpart: The Shadowlands. Beyond that, screaming under the skin of the world is the

- My Dinner with Aliksandros

Despite some colleagues' misgivings, I went out to confer with Aliksandros in a cafe in Nepal. As he spoke, my recorder caught vague impressions, half-heard voices that seemed to waver in and out of the transcript differently each time I listened to it. As for Aliksandros' hospitality, I'm glad to declare that I survived intact.

I'm sure he was only joking. You know, just to make a point. Really.



infinite expanse of the Tempest, an eternal storm. There are islands of stability and safety in this storm — the great city of Stygia is one, the islands of the Far Shores are others. There are also safe paths through the howling madness, called *Byways*, and a place at the storm's heart which is the least safe of all.

Layers around layers around layers, that is how the Underworld is built. The trick of it is, of course, that the further in you go, the more the next layer encompasses. So inside the Tempest, which is beneath all of existence, is a Labyrinth that holds at its heart a Void. Correction: *The* Void. Oblivion. The Great Unmaking.

I have seen it. I have also seen its servants, though. I have sojourned with one, and know how the nearer one comes to an ideal, the more one can be twisted by it. I still serve the Great Unmaking, hut with greater care, if that is possible. I very much believe it is.

Places of Interest

How does one describe the ports of call in a World vast enough to swallow our own mortal vision of Earth? I should instead concentrate on the largest aspects of that World and let the curious elaborate on that brief but ominous glimpse. After all, the descent into the Underworld is a tool of teaching, is it not? Some lessons can only be gained firsthand.

The Skinlands

These are the lands of the living. Ghosts, or "wraiths" as they prefer to be called, travel there but rarely, and usually with the aid of something dear to them in life. Fetters, these things are called, and they anchor a wraith against the pull of the Great Unmaking.

The ways in which wraiths affect the living are greater than one might suppose. They can manipulate objects and computers, steal dreams and even souls, and sometimes even materialize. This, however, is of little import. You are not here to learn about how wraiths can travel to our lands, but rather how we can reach theirs.

The Shroud

The stronger disbelief is in a place, the more the workaday world exerts itself, the stronger the Shroud grows. It is a simple cause and effect relationship. Of course, the opposite holds true; derelict "haunted" mansions at midnight, with thunder rolling about and lightning snaking across a witch-scoured sky above have a Shroud worn thin as cheesecloth. What does this matter? Simply put, the thicker the Shroud is in a place, the more difficult it is for wraiths to affect the Skinlands. The thinner the "barrier between the worlds," as our Verbena brethren would put it, the easier it is for the ghostly to affect the mundane. Watch where you walk, then, lest you rouse the ire of the dead.

The Shadowlands and Dwellers Therein

The thing you must understand about the "Shadowlands" is that they are the memories of what is and what once was. They are all about passion, and all about the power of that passion. **Anything** that anyone ever cared about is mirrored in the Shadowlands, though riddled there with rot and shackled in decay. The hatred of 10,000 **schoolchildren will ensure that the** five-day-a-week prison will rise in the Shadowlands, long after the school **building** they attended has crumbled to red brick dust. Of course, passions fade, and that's why everything looks as if it were falling to shreds. Memories vanish and passions fade, and those things sustained by memory and passion fade with them. But those places, those things that are much loved — or hated, or envied, or anything — they live on in the lands of the dead, long after their forms here have disappeared into the misty past.

Thus we explain the nature of the Shadowlands, the nature of its rot. It is all **detritus**, flotsam and jetsam that should sink to the Great **Unmaking**, but refuse to go. What can you say about faded beauty and **doddering** old age; ideas that don't know that they're dead? It is among these faded relics that the Restless Dead make their home, shuffling through the ruins.

They are the flames that burn brightest here, for they are Passion instead of being crafted by it. Each, it would seem, is a creature of the emotions that live on after death. Rather than being recreated by the passions of the living, they exist as *constructs* of passion. They are identities that hide deathless motivations, primal drives given faces.

One of my teachers once referred to wraiths as, and I quote, "the bubblegum on the Great Wheel, stuck to things they should have left long behind, and getting strung out trying to cling to them." One might think they would be happy for a chance to move on, to take the next step and be free. Like shipwreck victims clinging to the side of the lifeboat, though, they refuse to let go. Of course, having seen the Great Unmaking with my own eyes, I cannot blame them much.

Cosmology

The Underworld, or Deadlands, is composed of a series of levels, similar in form to fictional Narnia. The lands of the living are called the Skinlands, and are only rarely entered by wraiths. To affect the Skinlands directly is actually a crime in the Western Deadlands, and is punishable by incorporation or worse.

Separating the Skinlands from the rest of the Underworld is a veil of fear and disbelief called *the Shroud* (a.k.a. the Gauntlet). The more mundane reality is in a particular spot, the thicker its Shroud, and the more difficult it is for a wraith to affect the Skinlands there. Thus, accounting firms tend to have a thick Shroud, while deserted mansions on crooked peaks tend to have thin Shrouds.

Beyond the Shroud are the so-called Shadowlands, the true lands of the dead. These correspond precisely to the Skinlands in terms of physical location, and earthly buildings and objects manifest there dimly. Wraiths can walk through these Skinlands objects for the price of one level of their ghostly health (called Corpus). On the other hand, memories of beloved objects or buildings also appear here, and these are absolutely solid to a wraith, as are items created in the

Of course, death has changed these poor souls. Just as the buildings there are the products of memory and impression, so are formed the "bodies" of dwellers in that dimness.

Ponder that for a minute. Consider what that means.

Every wraith's visage and form, at least at first, are created by **their idea** of how they ought to appear. Most, thankfully, are **lacking** in imagination. They recreate themselves as they were in life, complete with their favorite apparel and knickknacks, and spend eternity with the same face they wore when they died. Men who died at their century mark dodder around the Shadowlands, appearing **exactly as they did just before passing** on. Why, when they could imagine themselves young and strong again? It shows a distinct lack of imagination, and for that I am thankful. A tiny minority actually have the hubris to recreate **themselves** better than they were, and strut around with the visages of angels.

But pity those wraiths with any imagination at all, for they resemble nothing of this — or often any other — Earth. Imagine what the creeping devil of self-hatred might do, when **granted** the power to shape your flesh.

I recall memories of tea in the Shadowlands of Providence with a woman who wore the ghosts of **elbow-length gloves**. In life she was the wife of a merchant captain who had dabbled in **hedge magick**. She dared to peek into a few of his grimoires upon occasion. On one of these occasions she became convinced that something; had stripped the flesh from her hands. She was wrong, of course, but she died, as **all do**, and journeyed in the Shadowlands. There, within her Caul, her birth-sac of the dead, her spirit clothed itself in garb it felt appropriate.

I will hear the faint clicking of **ghostly fingerbones** on china for a very long time. I can still see those gloves **flapping** loosely 'gainst the bones of her delicate arms. Nor was this highborn New England lady the most **horrifying** specimen of self-sculpting I encountered.

The torment for me, was, of course, that each and everyone of them had done it to themselves. This self-inflicted mutilation, this internal psychic flagellation spoke clearly to me as to the essential rightness of our calling. Had these wretches received the Good Death, they'd not spend centuries twisting themselves into mockeries and **priding** themselves on their handiwork.

Underworld. A wraith Incarcerated in a evil in a Skinlands prison can simply walk through the bars and escape. However, if that prison had burned down and manifested as a ghost of a building in the Shadowlands, then the walls would prove impenetrable to the most determined wraith.

Forever boiling under the surface of the Shadowlands is an eternal storm called the Tempest. Anything and everything imaginable is possible in the Tempest, from fishing for lost memories to storms of shattered glass. Existing as a sort of hyperspace beneath the "reality" of the Shadowlands, the Tempest links all points in the Underworld. Occasionally, the storm hursts forth into the Shadowlands; this horrific event is called a Maelstrom. Lesser rips in the fabric, of the reality, allowing passage between Shadowlands and Tempest, are called *Nihils*, and safe routes (rare) through the Tempest are called *Byways*.

Travel through the Tempest is faster for those wraiths possessing the Arcanos called Argos, but wraiths without Argos and other travelers often find themselves lost in the storm and attacked by Spectres or other beings.

At the heart of the Tempest is a titanic Labyrinth, inhabited by Spectres. Legend has it that the Labyrinth was gnawed from the stuff of nothingness by the great Spectres called Malfeans. The nomenclature in common between these beings and the like-titled Nephandi has been pondered extensively by many mages, but no satisfactory link has been made. The core of the great maze is the Void, the so-called "maw" of Oblivion. Nothing that has entered the Void has ever returned, at least not recognizably. Euthanatos cosmology holds that the Void is merely the final gateway on the road to reincarnation, but if so it is a hellishly oppressive barrier.

In the Tempest, entropy works as gravity. Darker souls and objects possessing more entropy to them drift down towards the Void more quickly than the pure of spirit.

There are islands of calm and safety within the Tempest. The one most familiar to Western wraiths is the isle of Stygia, now synonymous with the empire of the dead that rules from this seat. Other cultures also have their Realms in the storm; the Yellow Springs, Swar, and so on. Those who have connections in the lands of the living find it difficult, if not impossible, to travel far enough from them to reach Stygia. Some wraiths have no such bonds and can travel to Stygia freely (though the Shadowlands can present a problem). Others, bound by so-called Fetters, find the journey more difficult. Living humans often find the trip impossible.

Beyond Stygia, in the depths of the storm, are the Far Shores, islands modeled on a thousand heavens and hells. Few have journeyed so far, even among the dead; almost none of the living have reached them. Gateways are said to link them to the Astral Afterworlds, but this is conjecture at best.

Stygia

The capital city of the Empire of the Dead is, at the same time, magnificent and repulsive. Classical architecture struggles against Gothic monstrosities and modern needles of glass and steel. There are levels upon levels upon levels, with Roman fora pierced by obelisks and shaded by suspended walkways. Far below, huddled masses move among the crushed remnants of what might have been temples to forgotten gods, and through it all echoes the low moaning of the chains. During my stay as a guest of one of the most potent wraiths, a blackened and twisted mockery called Ember, I saw the towers piercing the eternal night sky of this place, gaily lit with watchfires against the dark. I knew what burned there, though, and I turned my gaze away. Out past the farthest building, I could see dark waves rolling against the seawall of the city, and a titanic gate guarded by distant soldiers.

So, would you like to see the Library of Alexandria, complete with original contents? Charon, the first and last Emperor of the Dead, had it brought to Stygia when it burned. Adventurous tourists also have their choice of the first and second temples of Jerusalem, though the ghostly Heretics known as Fishers claimed and abused the latter. All the great ones are here, as Stygia is where imperial cities go to die. They all fall, given time. They all find themselves replaced, and their pieces straggle to the Underworld. But in the meantime, the dead have treasures enough.

The Tempest

The Tempest is impossible to describe, as its geometry does not quite match up with that of the real world. I have been told that it is a great storm, a Maelstrom, that has hovered beneath all reality since the year 1580; I am not sure if I can permit myself to believe that. What I do believe, though, is that the Tempest contains anything and all things. Memories are there, and fragments of wraiths long gone. There is no "up" or "down" there, save the steady, entropic pull of the Void. It is a sort of hyperspace, a place between, and other than hard reality. I traveled in it briefly with a guide, and can remember little of my journey. What I can recall is inscribed below:

Cloudscape flew past us, and as its various humors changed, we were pelted with a soot-black rain, a blizzard of snowflakes made from bone, twisting rainbow filaments that burned to the touch, and other unspeakable things. Occasionally, the shapes below us turned to what appeared to be water, or occasionally dismal swamp, but always we sped on and I didn't ask our destination.

I recall that I did not ask our destination because I feared I knew what it was. I was, unfortunately, correct in my hypothesis. My guide steered me straight to Oblivion.

A word must he said about my guide ere I go on. He was not a wraith, not as such. Nor was he one of the "Whishtimmu," the mythical, monstrous beasts of all shapes and sizes that haunt the



Tempest in very small numbers. No, my guide was one of the wraiths who, in service to Oblivion, are twisted by it. He was, fair though his face might have been, a Spectre. Spectres are wraiths whose Shadows take over permanently. They are vicious, sadistic, deadly and, at least in this instance, a great deal more clever than I.

Shadows? Each wraith has a Shadow, yes, an animate voice for evil inside her own mind. The Shadow is of each wraith — it is her darkest impulses given a mind, a voice and, every so often, the ability to seize control of the shell it shares with the rest of the wraith's personality. The more tainted the personality, of course, the stronger the Shadow is and the easier it becomes for the Shadow to seize control. Spectres, as I have said, are wraiths whose Shadows have become dominant, have become their "selves." They do not make, in case you were wondering, optimal traveling companions.

A word of warning about Shadows and Spectres: They are part and parcel of Oblivion, part and parcel of Entropy. By using that Sphere in their presence, you feed them. You give them strength. This is a fearsome thing at the best of times and, in the lands of the dead, the best of times is usually no time at all.

The Labyrinth and the Great Unmaking

The Labyrinth itself, the great maze of tunnels gnawed from the stuff of nothingness by the greatest of Spectres at the dawn of time, is indescribable in the same way the storm that surrounds it is. All things are contained within its foul walls -- hospital corridors stinking of death, ossuaries

where the bones dance at Spectral whim, coal mine shafts claustrophobic enough to make the strongest soul whimper for a hint of blessed light — all of these are within the eternal maze. I am told that the Spectres use these settings in little shadowplays and psychodramas called *Harrowings*, during which they are permitted by some grand metaphysical dictum to torment wraiths with the victims' worst nightmares. I was forced to take part in one of these Harrowings — that is how I met Ember — and can honestly say that I have seen and done nothing more abhorrent in all of my days.

I was given the chance by my Spectral guide to look upon the Great Unmaking in person. I did so, and have regretted it ever since. The month of the Void was before me, and I could feel its hunger. Souls spiraled down past me, some screaming, some passive. All fell into that impenetrable blackness, and nothing emerged. It had a hypnotic pull, an insatiable appetite, and I found myself stepping off into the Void.

It was only my guide's hand that saved me, and then only because he wanted me for other things.

A Foul Practice

Even among the dead, the wish to create is strung. Furthermore, with the depredations of Spectres and the howling Tempest-bom winds of Maelstroms, wraiths need must craft the necessities of afterlife existence or else tumble to the Void. This, to them, is a fate literally worse than death. They do not see that beyond the mouth of Oblivion is

rebirth; they would rather cling to memories of what was than take a chance on what could be in another life.

Upon reflection, though, I do not much blame them.

Still, in order to maintain their ghostly state the citizens of Stygia do something that is unpardonable, monstrous and foul. Not content to halt their own progress upon the Great Wheel, they have the hubris, the sheer gall, to attest the movement of others as well.

Do you not yet understand? Some wraiths refuse to move on actively. They see the choice, yes, and refuse it. Others, though, do not have that choice. Nor, for that matter, do they still have mind, spirit or any manifestation of the soul beyond the physical one. At the hands of their fellow wraiths, they have become things. Objects, Swords and torches, ashtrays and *objets d'art* — these are all made from souls! And not the souls of animals, no — the souls of women and men! All caught and hammered — or somehow shaped — by whatever means the foulest of wraiths use to drain others of their will and trap them for all eternity as tools.

Horrible, is it not? One almost wishes that the Great Unmaking would rise like the spring tide and claim all those who have been falsely kept from it. Almost.

Transcendence

Here is the sole source of hope in the lands of the dead. The Far Shores, touted as heavens and hells beyond counting, are neither so far as I know. They mimic form but not function, providing a heaven's landscape or a hell's torments without the spiritual authority of either.

Transcendence remains, though. It is Oblivion's opposite, a lifting off of the Great Wheel to... what? I do not know. I have not witnessed it, I have not seen it — I have merely heard it rumored and gossiped after.



*In the drowsy dark cave of the mind
Dreams build their nest with fragments
Dropped from day's caravan.*

— Rabindranath Tagore

Speak to me of raindrops and I'll sell you a migraine. Breathe in my ear and I'll vomit forth rainbows in which all the wisdom of Greece can be heard. Confused? Get used to it. If you venture forth into the Dreaming, you must accustom yourself to contradictions.

You have already visited the Dreaming many times; perhaps the adventures you had there seemed beyond your control, or perhaps you have already learned the ways of what mortals call "lucid dreaming," the art of moving yourself through the Maya with conscious deliberation

Do I believe in it? Most certainly. Even Incarna come from somewhere; why not from the ranks of the dead? Then again, perhaps I merely wish for something to counter the horror of the Great Unmaking. The belief itself, though, is enough. I think.

Travel to the Underworld

So, how does one reach the Deadlands? In a manner of speaking, you and I are already in the Underworld. The Skinlands is a home to the dead as well, albeit one in which they are not entirely comfortable. That, however, is likely not an answer to your satisfaction. You wish to know how to reach the Shadowlands, the Tempest and beyond, the places where the dead dwell and where you would truly be an outsider. Well, there is a brace of methods for traveling to the Shadowlands. One is difficult, the other is easy.

The difficult one is, perhaps, the more rewarding. Through the magical practice of *agama*, the ritual visit all my kind make to the Shadowlands to learn the impermanence of our reality, one can separate spirit from body and become, albeit temporarily, a wraith. During the agama sojourn, one's own body serves as a Fetter—something much loved that holds the traveler to the lands of the living even as his soul searches the domains of the dead. With luck, one can employ this method, journey to the heart of the Underworld and return with a wealth of experience and, dare I say it, knowledge.

The other method? It is much simpler. Think back to the tea that I offered you when you first arrived, and which you were gracious enough to accept. That tea had a hint of almond to its taste, did it not? A slight bitterness? Think on that and close your eyes. After all, I did mention that the second method of reaching the lands of the dead was much, much easier than the first.

Maya

rather than instinct. Maybe you have even accomplished the astral visitation known as *hayimn*, where your mind seeps across the barriers of other sleeping minds and steps into a communal Realm. Or possibly the fae have invited you on one of their mad dances, intoxicating you just enough to share the wellspring of their nature. And, of course, you have read books. Many books. And in each book lie the seedlings of a dream.

You doubt me? Just look at the hordes who greet an author at his signings, at the millions who hang upon each installment of a fictional hero's escapades, no matter how contrived they may be. Visit a fantasy convention, and see the dozens, the hundreds, who mold their lives after the creations of Tolkien, Lovecraft, Stoker or McCaffrey. Look at your own actions; in buying this book, you have consented to share our dreams.

- **Janis Freyal, Chronicler of the Impossible**

I owe this person a big favor. Although he (or she; I'm never sure) was hesitant to describe the Dream Worlds, I convinced Janis to give me a few thousand words on the subject. Janis warned me that whatever s/he contributed would be virtually negated, yet reinforced in all the wrong ways when I published it. I thought I'd put it in anyway. If Janis seems impatient, blame me.

Surprising as it may seem, Janis is not a Dreamspeaker (although her/his associate Monaco Sabine supposedly is); many of my acquaintances—including my dear friend Laughing Eagle, who kindly but firmly declined to contribute—felt that the Dreaming was far too sacred an enigma to set on paper. Given the trivialization his own culture has received throughout "history," I can sympathize. Janis, however, is an outspoken advocate for preservation of the Dreaming. From what I've heard, s/he has a strong fae heritage, and is painfully familiar with the ways in which banality can kill.

if nothing else, Janis' insights may prove entertaining. Just don't expect them to provide you with a road map. That road doesn't exist.

— Alexis

This is the reason I chose to place my observations of dreams on paper. Not because other media cannot portray the Dreaming—visual art and music convey the Maya's essence more potently than the written word—-but because writing is dreaming. In the very act of employing a language, we bring the essence of creating into form. Writing is the lasting impression of that form.

The Origins of Dreams

To many authorities, creation started with a dream, with the vision of One whose longings led to many. More humanocentric mages claim that dreams flow from us, not the other way around. While that's certainly the case with most small Dream Realms, where ideas become realities unto themselves, the larger aspects of the Deep Dreaming seem far older than humankind. These Realms, often dominated by godlike beings called Oneira, may be the source of the ideas which then become Dream Realms. The possibilities are as circular and as ephemeral as the dreams themselves.

I have three theories about the Oneira; I cannot prove them, for I have never met one personally, but I can make educated assumptions about them based on what I have noticed about other, lesser dream spirits:

- One: That the "dream lords" are archetypes incarnate, living symbols put into vaguely human terms. The Major Arcana of the Tarot, the stereotypes of the

commediadell'arte, the gods we immortalize as planets, myths or psychological complexes, all spring from the ageless Oneira. In their Deep Dreaming homes, the Virgin, the Hermit, the Temptress, the God of War, and so many others hold court, sending their influence into our consciousness, where we feed them our imaginations and make them grow stronger still.

- Two: That such beings have what power we give them, but that such power should never be underestimated. Simply declaring "I don't believe in you any more" may dispatch a Night Terror, but a dream lord will simply laugh, "Ah, but so many others still *da...*"

- Three: That by observing these beings as both symbols and as living entities, we can learn greater truths about ourselves, the human condition, and creation itself.

For the practical traveler, I have a simple truth: Be careful what you do, where you go and whom you speak to while dream walking. The forces you disturb can and often will follow you into the waking world. Unless the vision you enter is your own, it can turn against you in surprising ways. And remember when visiting that dreams can also become nightmares,

Dream Realms and How to Reach Them

The easiest way to reach the Maya is, of course, by going to sleep. Naturally, as a mage, you will want more detailed travel plans, so I advise those of you who wish to reach the Maya on your own to practice meditation. Once you achieve the right state of mind, you may enter the space between dreams, the Near Dreaming.

Walking into a dream is always harder than drifting into it through sleep. Some shamans can wander into the Maya in spirit form, but most of us remain on this side of the Big Dream until we slumber. Those who specialize in mental magicks can send their minds into this Zone through astral travel. From their bodies, they reach up and out, sweeping into the astral sky and heading for the Moon. As the clouds enfold them, the dream paths open.

The paths to the Maya wind through dark hallways, bridges or tunnels, emerging into either a dreamscape in progress or into a vast and shimmering ocean of Ether (or other landscapes; see sidebar).

Floating like a bug in 7-Up, you can watch the blobs of "imaginoplasm" drift past, often opaque but occasionally transparent enough to display the show inside. From there, a skillful traveler can walk through the pericarp and enter the Dream Realm itself. Once in, you'd best be clever. Getting out, I'm told, is often much harder than getting in. Once you've walked into a dream in progress, that dream becomes *your* dream as well, and it conforms to your actions and expectations.

The "Geography" of the Dreaming

Trying 10 place borders on the Maya, I've encountered the same difficulties that other authors doubtless found in their own sections: the Realms that I describe refuse to conform to static boundaries. Therefore, take what I say with salt; your adventures there will depend upon your imaginations, not on my descriptions.

First of all, the Dreaming exists as an independent reality (a Zone?), tied to the Umbrae and the material world by slender threads indeed. In its nearest contact, it hugs the waking world in a chimerical reality that the fae consider home. While those with faerie sight can see the wonders that surround them — a path of gold across a busy intersection, a dragon's grotto inside an abandoned warehouse — most mortals, even mages, remain Mind to such wonders.

This first layer, called by some the *Near Dreaming*, resembles the Penumbra of the spirit worlds, but exists apart from it. The energy of this "realm," called *Glamour* by the changelings, shapes imagination into magics and creatures that few human eyes can see. These creations — *cantrips* and *chimera*, respectively — have power only over those who can perceive them. Thus, many familiar with such magicks appear insane to anyone around them — yes, even to us "enlightened" few. Lack of imagination muffles these forces until it threatens the fringes of the Dreaming itself. This phenomenon accounts for the scarcity of faeries in our modern world, and explains why so many people in the "modern" world catapult directly into the deeper — and more disturbing — Maya Realms without the restful buffer of the Near Dreaming to cushion their flight.

In these further reaches, the Far Dreaming, the shards of imagination — *Dream Realms* — float in an endless sea of possibility. Some travelers see this region as an ocean with scattered islands, while others envision themselves beneath that ocean, able to breathe but compelled to seek out the bubbles that dreams have become. I know of a shaman who claims her dreamwalks take her to a desert

spotted with glittering cities, and most fae of my acquaintance speak of *troads*, paths which meander across mystical landscapes filled with wondrous perils. As with so many other Otherworldly things, we can assume that the Far Dreaming takes many different forms.

Dream Realms, also called *dreamscapes*, take all the imagination a person feeds into them and expand to fit it. In most cases, these Realms last for a few minutes then disappear; potent ones can linger, drawing the dreamer back into recurring phantasies. The most powerful dreams of all — those shared with other people — take on a "life" of their own, becoming larger and more elaborate with each dreamer who visits them. In time, such dreams become stories, then legends, then myths. In time, they may "lodge" in the Middle Umbra and become Mythic Realms (described in Chapter Two). That's why books are such potent creations — they take the elements of written language, symbol and archetype, mix them with the imagination of a vast audience, and give birth to mythology.

Once created, Dream Realms drift like bubbles. The greater the dream, the larger and slower the Realm it created becomes. Smaller dreamscapes bob listlessly between the Umbrae of the Astral, Middle and Dead Worlds; although they remain in a Zone apart, their contents mirror the World they pass across, giving rise to puzzles, nature dreams and deathmares. Larger Realms tend to end up in a more or less fixed location; the World they "inhabit" colors the whole Realm, and all visitors feel its power.

On the furthest fringes of the Near Dreaming, the Dream Realms are bisected by the Horizon. On the other side of this membrane is the primeval portion of the Maya called the *Deep Dreaming*. If creation did indeed spring from dreams, the fragments of those epiphanies exist here as massive Realms, the *Onerae*. The comatose, the mad and the fearless drift into these cyclopean spirit-homes. Few dreamers this far gone ever return to our waking world. Even the fae avoid this place. Here, my friends, true dragons be.

Descriptions of Dreams

Leaving someone else's dream can be tricky; unless you can overpower their mind, your fate belongs to them and you leave at their pleasure. Exiting your own dream is easy; unless some spirit captures you (and this can happen...), you simply snap yourself awake. Note that the moment between sleep and wakefulness produces a vortex which allows dream spirits into our world. Most of them dissipate after a moment or so, but some linger in the dark corners of your room, feeding on the imagination and passion you shed while awake. Not all such creatures are hostile — some, like the elusive Amore Muse, are to be treasured -- but it's worth remembering that dreams can follow you home.

How does one detail the dream? Summarize an epiphany? Measure the drifting foundations of imagination? It is a task that cannot be done. Merely trying reduces the dream to banal words and empty metaphors. Even so, you the reader wish to know the experiences others have shared while traveling the Realms. Even when we may find the answers inside our own memories, we do not feel validated until we have seen those same territories mapped out with surgical precision by one with "authority." Very well. Rather than reveal my own experiences—which I have done about as much as I care to do — I present two friends of mine, Monaco Sabine and Malcolm, to elaborate on places they have seen. Fare thee well, O brave magicians!

Hollywood

Hollywood is like being nowhere and talking to nobody about nothing.

— Michelangelo Antonioni

Who hasn't dreamt of being a Hollywood movie star? Every child, every adult who's ever seen a movie has at one time thought of it, dreamt of it, yearned for it. To deny this is to deny what makes you human, to deny that which makes you yearn for a better life, for a happier home, for achievement, for enlightenment, for Ascension.

As we all know, things are never simple, even in dreamland. The first-time visitor to Hollywood must endure the "casting couch." A son of screen test, this experience has proven, for most, to be a very emotionally charged event in which the visitor must act through a dramatic scene. Those who give themselves over to the scene are welcomed in. With the casting couch behind them, these visitors find themselves in a Hollywood movie studio.

One main street, known as The Boulevard, runs the length of the Realm, disappearing in a dot at the horizon. A plethora of sights, sounds and smells assault the senses. First one theme song, then another, tantalizes your ears, taunting you to name that movie. Similarly, a cacophony of odors reaches out to pull at your memories: cigarette smoke, a salty ocean breeze, gunpowder, all with underlying hints of paint, perfume and popcorn.

The Boulevard teems with extras, stunt men, grips and gaffers pushing racks of costumes or carrying odd props. From time to time, a western hero jumps from a roof onto the back of his horse and rides off into the sunset, or a cop car goes screaming by. Actors, famous of face and name, mingle among their supporting cast, playing out a love scene, blowing adoring kisses or lolling, drunk, in the gutter. The actors are not themselves, but the characters they most famously portrayed. They appear in costume, in character, and those filmed in black and white *are* black-and-white. I've seen several Bogies, a black and white version of Rick from Casablanca among them. Marilyn's white convertible cruises the Boulevard, her blond hair caught back in a pink scarf.

• Monaco Sabine

Hollywood, one of the largest and most stable of the Maya, floats among the other dream bubbles, a glistening, glittering gate to the grandiose. Entering the first time is difficult, but once you're in, you can never be turned away. The casting couch awaits. Prove that your heart is as big as your dream, and you're in. The adventure starts then. But to truly appreciate the Hollywood Realm, one must understand intimately the expression "larger than life." My associate Monaco Sabine, bani Dreamspeakers, shares her insight into the Realm of Hollywood Idolatry.

Jimmy Stewart, without Technicolor, runs down the sidewalk, shouting, "It's a wonderful life!" His black and white image stands out perversely against the glittering red sequins of Ginger's ball gown as he pushes past her,

These characters appear and disappear as if magically transported in and out of existence. A Wells Fargo truck may appear several blocks away, come down the street and pass you, only to disappear several hundred feet further down as if driven through an invisible curtain. People appear out of nowhere, stroll past and nod just as they begin to fade again. Though I found this effect very disturbing at first, it adds to the surreal atmosphere of the Realm. On several occasions, my conversations with these characters were interrupted when they suddenly vanished from my presence. The disappointment of meeting your favorite character or actor, only to have him disappear before your eyes, is particularly frustrating.

The Realm itself seems to draw a distinction between the characters and the actors who played them. Both are represented here. The characters replay their scenes, their lives, their triumphs, and their tragedies over and over again. Here, in Hollywood, they live and breathe. They can talk and think, their existence made all the more tragic for the unchanging events around which their fictional lives revolve. No matter how many times they replay it, the endings never change. These events leak out onto the Boulevard in the bubbles of fiction which surround each of the characters. I have found it impossible to have a conversation with these automatons. They remain so locked into the story for which they were created that they cannot break free from it. They spout their lines and see only what their director told them to see.

The actors, on the other hand, do not seem quite so trapped in a story. They can converse as any normal person can, recognizing you for who you are. Amazingly, they also have a conscious understanding of where they are. James Dean taught me more about this Realm than I could have learned in 10 years otherwise, with his thoughtful, though angst-filled, understanding of the human condition. Some of my colleagues have suggested that these actors are actually wraiths who, instead of passing on as most others do, were drawn to the Hollywood Realm, I reserve judgment on this theory until further investigation can be conducted.

Long rows of buildings line both sides of the Boulevard, comprising a large variety of structures from saloon to skyscraper. These buildings change regularly. A farmhouse can become a corner drug store in the flash of an eye. People exit and enter the buildings, and it would seem that a given building's nature is dictated by the characters who surround it at any one moment.

Entering a building transports the visitor to the locale of the movie. On one occasion, I made the mistake of entering the Bates Motel. I found myself, in black and white, standing at the foot of a long hill, looking up at an old manse. In the uppermost window, a woman looked down at me. Behind me stood the motel, dark and ominous. A woman's scream cut through me and without further thought, I turned and left the way I had entered.



Background

The girl from an Iowa farm, the hoy from the Bronx, the woman at the San Diego convenience store, and the man waiting tables in Biloxi, all have one dream in common: Hollywood stardom. Is it so surprising that generations of individuals, from different places and different lives, so many starstruck nobodies, could share a dream large enough to create a Realm in the Maya? As I've sat in that dark theater, sharing the fantasy on the screen with a roomful of faceless strangers, I've often marveled at the magic of it. In those two hours, if the magic-makers did their job properly, the suspension of disbelief becomes a physical thing. For a short time, everyone knows that superheroes can fly and that a girl from Kansas can have a wondrous adventure with her dog. Together, the moviegoers allow their minds and hearts to open.

Movie stars become gods. Is it any wonder that so many people want to be a part of that? To live the fantasy rather than watch it on the big screen? To become the god or goddess who can, with a look or a wave of the hand, change the face of reality as we know it? To win against all odds and benefit from coincidence that would or could only happen in the movies? And then, to come out at the other end of adventure with perfect make-up or a suave comment to brush away the seriousness of the moment.

Who can blame humanity for making that "unreality" a part of its dreams, for persevering on that fantasy?

The average Sleeper simply "fades into" a role when he arrives; to him, the Realm becomes an opportunity to relive his favorite film, or to rewrite it with himself as the star. A deliberate traveler enters the dreamscape in a more concrete way — she actually assumes one of the important roles in a given story. If you understand how to break the cinematic spell, you can walk away from the storyline when things get nasty (if you *want* to; many don't). If not, you're there until the film roars to its climax. This can be a really fun ride, so long as you're prepared for the trip.

Outside the sets, the visitor becomes another star, a feature of the Realm that may be more powerful than the re-creations themselves. For as long as the traveler remains "behind the scenes," her life becomes a whirlwind of offers, vices, rejections, triumphs, awards and disappointments. You can go from boom to bust in a single visit to Hollywood, rushing from aspiring starlet to fallen goddess in a single long night. The sensation never lasts, but it's as intoxicating as the real thing and involves a lot less waiting. Remember, though, that this "career" mirrors the legend of stardom, not the real-life business of acting. The dream, after all, is so much more exciting than the reality.

Places of Interest

The disorienting nature of the Realm and its shifting cast of characters make it a hard place to pin down. All the same, some features remain throughout the myriad changes the dreamscape undergoes:

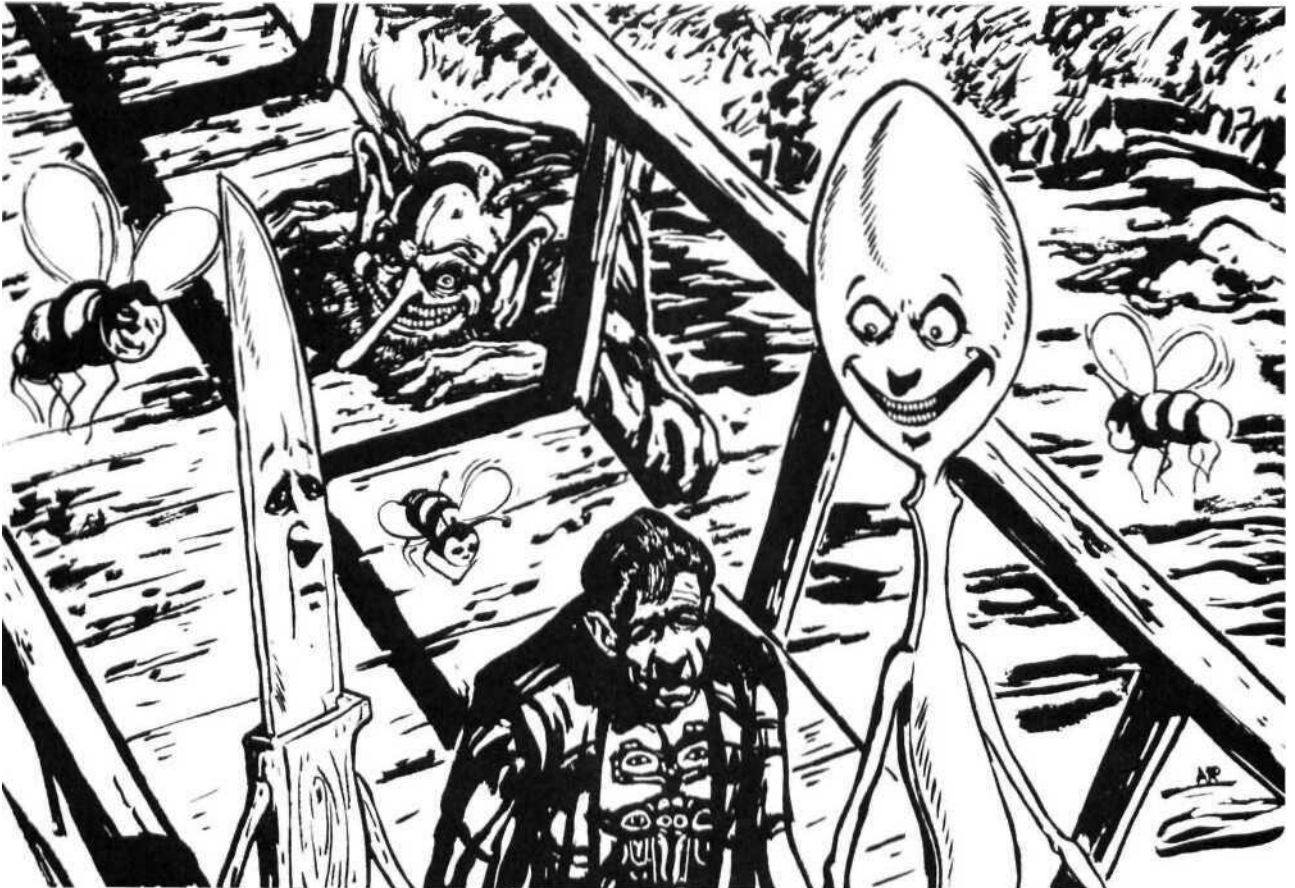
- **The Casting Couch:** As I mentioned above, the Casting Couch is Hollywood's foyer. More a moment than an actual place, all who want in must cross this threshold. I have heard that this experience varies greatly between visitors. For most, or so they say, it merely tests the limits of your imagination, throwing the visitor into a scene and demanding a performance. For me, it was much more. For my Casting Couch, I was faced with one of the most emotional moments of my life and forced to play it all out again. Although at the time I didn't realize it, it actually occurred in the flash of an eye in my mind. As the scene unfolded, I could not change a thing. The words, pre-scripted, flew from my mouth with as little control as the emotions that overtook me. Needless to say, I emerged, somewhat rattled, on the other side.

Apparently, I got the part. Now, when I go to Hollywood, I'm welcomed by a throng of autograph-seekers and agents who want to represent me during my visit. It's rather strange, and at first I didn't know how to react. The key, of course, is to be gracious with your fans and aloof with the agents. It's all a matter of attitude. Always leave them wanting more.

- **The Sets:** The buildings which line the Boulevard, dropping in and out, trading places, appearing and disappearing, each represent one movie in the entire body of work produced for "Hollywood." From the desert of Arabia to the depths of the ocean, if a movie has taken place there, a set exists for it; some structures on the Boulevard welcome visitors inside and recreate familiar moments. The characters linger here, solid ghosts, reliving their parts, coming and going, oblivious to all but their roles. I have seen Dorothy and Scarlett O'Hara and Darth Vader and Sara Connor. I learned, as all visitors must, that upon entering a building, you enter that world, still an outsider, but a participant nevertheless. I have watched my favorite films from the inside, trembling in terror, crying in pain, aching with love, more deeply involved than ever I was in the theater,

Here's the danger in a Hollywood visit: when you enter a set, you enter the story. Dream spirits treat you as one of their own, and soon consider you part of the story. This is fun as long as you remember that the essence of drama is Conflict, usually with a capital "C." Every experience in Hollywood is intense, and that intensity can be draining when you're a part of the action. Oh, and stay clear of bullets, knives, monsters and explosions — they don't just hurt, they can kill.

- **Inter-Reality Possession (IRP):** I've heard reports of visitors actually becoming one of the characters in the story, in a sort of "inter-reality possession" (IRP). I suspect that this relates to the dreamwalker's state of mind at the



time he or she enters the set. Identifying a bit too closely with the character you play can open the doors for a rip-roaring case of IRP, which can be disconcerting at best and lethal at worst. Although anyone who enters a set puts himself at some risk, the visitor who falls victim to inter-reality possession does so even more drastically—he loses all control of the plot and must ride out the movie in the body of the character. As you can imagine, if the character is slated to die, this could be disastrous.

This phenomenon of inter-reality possession seems to occur only in the sets, as soon as a visitor enters one of the **buildings lining the Boulevard**. Survivors have described the feeling as extremely **disorienting**. They essentially drop into another body, another time, and another place, in the middle of someone else's life. Powerful forces control them and they become like spectators watching from the inside-out.

Interviews with some of these survivors have indicated that once the original disorientation wears off, you discover some amount of autonomy and can actually change the unfolding events—with a powerful effort of will, of course. This is not recommended, however, especially if you know that your character comes out all right at the end of the film. Why risk turning events against you?

The sets themselves seem unaffected by the laws of physics. They don't seem like sets at all, but like actual locations. Each one takes up more space than it should be able to do given the restraints of the building. Through some miracle of illusion, the sun overhead appears real. What should be no more than 40 square feet expands to become a valley, a desert, an ocean. Rain actually pelts down; hurricanes and tornadoes blow; the cold bites. Herein lies another danger of Hollywood. Do not underestimate the impact of a bullet, nor the power of a speeding car in Hollywood. While, in the theater, these things cannot harm moviegoers, in Hollywood they can,

Ecology

Documenting the "ecology" of Hollywood is an impossible task. Visitors should just stay on their toes and never underestimate the power of the imagination. The characters and creatures inhabiting the Hollywood Realm have the skills and abilities they have in their respective movies, which makes some of them incredibly dangerous. Although this also means that the villains miss more often than they hit (they certainly miss more often than the hero), it's a bad idea to get trapped into a slasher flick or macho movie unless you've got the skills to survive it.

As I mentioned, it's been suggested, but never proven, that some of the characters roaming the sets are wraiths, actors in life who couldn't leave Hollywood behind when they died. They mingle with the characters they played, often stepping back into their old roles or playing alongside their character, mirroring their motions and words in a pitiful display of nostalgia. Unlike the native inhabitants of

this Realm, these ghosts aren't the characters they played. Each is the actor, the person, the human soul it was in life, with all its faults, fears, addictions and hates. Beware these beings, for their egos and psychoses can be powerful forces. Especially if you're stealing their scene!

The Land of Nod

In the next room was Michael. When Michael was seven, a school friend's mother had instilled in him a mortal fear of cancer. Unfortunately, she hadn't explained what cancer actually was.

Michael had his own ideas.

—Alan Moore, "...A Time of Running..." (*Swamp Thing*)

The Land of Nod squats atop a dreamscape mountain on the fringes of the Underworld, a brooding monster, as hungry as any that ever hid beneath a child's bed. In the Land of Nod, all the fears of childhood come racing back to confront you in flesh and blood. If you thought they were scary in your imagination, just think what they're like here. Although it isn't officially considered a Nightmare Realm, I personally think it comes close. I am Monaco Sabine, Dreamspeaker and frequent visitor to the Land of Nod.

This Realm has one fascinating and dangerous aspect that it shares with few others: Its influence reaches beyond its "physical" borders. Many other dreamscapes contain dismal paths to this eternal Realm, winding roads with a sickening dread growing at the end of each one. A mile or so away from the Land of Nod's borders, revulsion sets in. It's as if someone had given you a plate of spider soup for supper. Even so, once your feet end up on the road to Nod, it's almost impossible to change your course. The further you go, the sleepier you become. Soon, the shadows lengthen and walking becomes a chore, then a burden, then impossible. Even the mightiest mages fall victim to the slumber of childhood remembered, if the talcs I've heard are any indication, the really powerful mages are the most vulnerable of all.

At the end of the pathway, surrounding shadows lengthen and stretch; the landscape fades, twisting and darkening, and the desire to lie down becomes overwhelming. Squares of light, like those created by a car passing outside your bedroom window, travel across the sky. They're usually the last things you see before sleep overcomes you.

Description

The second time I visited the Land of Nod, the dreamscape had changed somewhat. Undoubtedly, it varies for other visitors as well. Even so, I'll attempt to give you an idea of what Nod is like, or at least how it was during my own travels....

I awoke in complete darkness. Something small and furry, with more legs than any creature should have, ran across my hand. A loud booming, regular and steady, like the

footsteps of an approaching giant, commenced in the distance, getting louder and closer. The footsteps stopped and the sound of a doorknob turning preceded a thin crack of light, approximately 30 feet tall, which appeared in the darkness. Ever so slowly, the crack broadened, illuminating the room. Snakes and spiders slithered and crept everywhere.

A loud, angry growl sounded from the other side of the door as the crack grew wider, I decided to make a run for it. I bolted through the crack, around the monster and out into Mtnli^hi. A field of flowers and green, green grass spread out before me, cut in half by a sparkling brook. A path led me across the field to a bridge. As I stepped up and began to cross, I heard from below, "Halt, Who dares to cross my bridge?"

The Land of Nod, as we have come to call it, is the manifestation of the fairy tales (read "horror stories") that everyone heard as a child, and of the nightfears that plague children around the world. Herein, the visitor will find the living, biting, clawing version of the monster he forgot years ago when he grew up. Don't underestimate these creatures, the Kid Fears and Night Terrors—they'll tear you apart. For who but children have such powerful imaginations?

The most disconcerting aspect of the Land of Nod is the fact that everything is somewhat larger than it should be. The Realm has been created from a child's point of view, you see, and the world around them looms so much larger than we adults remember.

Background

The wicked witch, the child-eating troll, the hungry hairy monster, the bogey man, the wolf, Bloody Mary.... The list goes on and on. How many horrors do we inflict upon our children? How many leave permanent psychological scars? How many nights do they lie awake, afraid to move or to even put a toe over the edge of the mattress, for fear of the thing under the bed? How often has the darkness become a living, breathing thing, hungering for child-flesh? And how often do the parents themselves become the monsters, the feared ones who come to hurt the child?

Children have powerful magic, and their imaginations have not been restrained by culturalization and "grown-up" rationality. The belief of a child is undiluted. Is it any wonder that one of the largest and most dangerous Dream Realms was born of the fears and beliefs of children?

Places of Interest

Each child fears different things; those fears, in turn, affect the journeys we endure in the Land of Nod. My own experiences in the Realm reflected a somewhat prosaic American childhood. I can only imagine the shapes a Bosnian child's nightmares might create. And imagination, as you know by now, is the stuff dreamscapes are made of.

The house

The archetypal haunted mansion, the House sits on top of a hill above the field of flowers I mentioned earlier. Its outer walls are painted black, with white shutters. Walking around the outside, you might notice that although it appears to be rectangular in shape, like any normal house, it actually has five outer walls. The grass all around the house is dead and yellow. The windows are dark, arranged upon the facade like eyes and mouths. The front door opens of its own accord to all those who would enter, then shuts — and locks— behind. The entire first floor is a living room, from which a door leads down to the basement. A bedroom and bathroom take up the top floor where a hatch in the ceiling leads to the attic.

- **The Living Room:** From inside the house, it always appears to be pitch-dark night outside. In the living room, large windows consume the walls. Oddly, they differ from those you see from outside the house. French doors open off one side of the room. Heavy curtains, parted, flank all the windows. A howl from outside invariably marks the beginning of the attack. Red eyes glow in the darkness beyond the windows. One window may fly open, allowing a strong breeze to throw the curtains aside. A crack of lightning illuminates the creature waiting to get in.

A long set of stairs climbs up to the second floor. They're creaky, metal stairs, open in the back. Anything could reach through and grab you. Furthermore, the area behind the stairs remains hidden in an unnatural inky blackness. Periodically, a shuffle, a smack, or an exhalation can be heard coming from the dark.

- **The Second Floor:** Whereas one would assume that children would perceive their bedroom as the safest place in the house, this doesn't appear to be so. The window is always dark, night-time, but outside, red eyes glow and some thing claws at the glass. The bedroom rumbles with monsters — under the bed, in the drawers, on the ceiling. Beware, especially, the odd clown doll sitting in the rocking chair. It's not as sweet as it would seem.

In the bathroom, an oversized toilet sits next to the wall. A strange green glow emanates from inside the bowl. From time to time, a large bubble gurgles to the surface of the water. Don't toy with the monster in the toilet. Nearby, a gigantic porcelain bathtub holds a gaping drain. Strange burbles and groans rise from the drain hole. Creatures crawl out of it, and scaly hands reach up to pull whatever they can find back down with them.

- **The Attic and the Basement:** Remember the fear a kid feels when he sticks his vulnerable little head up through a hole into a dark and mysterious place? Don't go up in the attic. If the skittering and red eyes don't convince you, then perhaps the darkness will. A clean square of light shines through the trap door in the

ceiling, but beyond that, everything remains obscured. A shuffle, a growl, a scratch heard at first in the tat corner moves slowly out, advancing bravely upon the intruder to its space, until its claws extend into the square of light. By then, you've waited too long.

The basement is, by far, the most dangerous area in the whole house. Monsters live in the walls down here, hiding in shadowy corners and especially behind the stairs. They can come up through the dirt floor to grab at anyone passing by. Giant spiders hang on webs near the ceiling and rats watch from the window sills. Trunks and boxes, stacked around, provide perfect hiding places and a labyrinth for lurking. One bare bulb lights the room, perpetually swinging, sending shadows running back and forth across the floor and walls. In one corner, the light does not reach. Here, the dirt floor falls away into a bottomless pit from which no one has ever returned. No indication warns the visitor; the pit appears as little more than a shadow upon the floor. Step carefully.

The Doctor's Office

Located on another hill overlooking a wide cornfield, just past the House, the Doctor's Office resembles an austere old mansion. The sign out front says simply, "Doctor." Inside the smell is nauseating. It's that hospital/old-people/sickness/cover-it-up-with-antiseptic smell that burns itself into your nose and doesn't go away for days. The waiting room is filled with lepers and decrepit old people who have dirtied their underwear. A puddle of blood remains unattended on the floor.

The doctor himself is a terrifying caricature, with a broad mouth and whiskers like those of a catfish. His white coat has odd stains all over it, insipid reds and yellows and greens. He carries cold, steel tools which are four times as large as they should be. Whenever he approaches, he appears all warped and stretched as if you view him through a convex lens. The closer he gets, the larger he seems. His hand, outstretched, seems huge in comparison to the rest of his body. The same occurs if he leans his face forward; his whole head grows to a disproportionate size in relation to his more distant body. The doctor likes to poke and he likes to prod and he likes to look at all your private places.

The Funeral Parlor

Undoubtedly born from the terrors of children who've experienced a funeral, this place seems unbearable, even for an adult. The smell alone, as you walk in through the giant front doors, is enough to send you running back out to find the sunshine. Located on the other side of the forest, the Funeral Parlor is completely black on the outside. Giant pillars line a narrow front porch. A gloom hangs over the building, blocking out the sun without the help of clouds.

Inside, distance warps. It takes forever to get anywhere, no matter how fast you walk. In the anteroom, a handful of people stand around, men and women, all wearing black. Their faces are loose, wet with tears, and extremely sad. Then they look at you, all of them at once, and their gaze grows hard, accusing. Their fingers stab toward you like pikes; their hands reach out, clasping, groping. Some grasp your shoulders and drag you to them. Their hugs are like stone. Their bodies smell had. Stale. Dead.

Through a rounded doorway, another room awaits. Its aisle stretches out forever between towering rows of chairs. Other people, like gray statues, glower from their rigid seats. All gazes fasten on you, as hands push you forward, hard, insistent. The reek of rancid flowers enfolds you like a cloying fog, and the organ's tune crawls like spiders on your skin,

At the end of the aisle, a large black coffin dominates a dais. The lid is open, but the dais is too high. No matter how tall you may be, the platform looms above you, beckoning. To see inside, you must step up on a narrow ledge. The hands behind you will not tolerate refusal. You must look into the casket.

The corpse inside is not pretty, but it is familiar. Think of a loved one — any loved one — and there she is, all laid out in ghastly make-up and dusty dress. Beneath the dress, something moves. Lots of somethings.

Worms. Everything is full of worms,

The School

The two-room school on the far side of the apple tree has brick walls, a cracked sidewalk and a decrepit playground in the back. On the playground, a fat little boy, nearly eight feet tall, walks around with his fists clenched, looking for someone to pick on. A group of laughing girls sprout teeth and claws and giggle around their victim, even as they tear his flesh away.

Welcome back to school. It's as bad as you remember.

From time to time, a bell rings, echoing painfully in your ears. The teacher, a twisted old woman with angry eyes and cruel words, carries a metal pointer in one hand, swinging it mercilessly at naughty boys and girls. Books fly constantly around the room, slamming into anything that gets in the way. When the bell rings again, everyone piles back out onto the playground. Everyone, that is, but the unlucky victim who has been singled out for a trip to the principal's office.

At the end of a long empty hallway, the door to the principal's office looms large and menacing. From inside, a funeral dirge plays softly. The door opens of its own accord, growing taller and wider as the darkness inside swells. A growl emanates from the black interior, then out of nowhere, a scaly finger with a broken, yellow nail, motions the visitor within, and instinctively you know this is going to hurt.

Ecology

Many strange and dangerous beings roam the Land of Nod. Dream spirits, known by some as Kid Fears or Night Terrors, sweep into view, taking whatever form seems fitting at the time. Some of them even follow you home and greet you the next night with a closet full of shadows. No one is immune to the terrors of the Realm, or to the helplessness that comes with them. Children see a great deal and understand little. What may, to an adult, seem perfectly natural can be horrifying and repulsive to a child. Every half-heard sound, odd shadow or funny smell becomes a nightmare. And all children's nightmares end up here.

A small sampling of them includes:

- **The Wolves:** Dogs are scary — big, smelly and vicious, they snap off little boys' fingers and eat little girls' guts. Everyone knows the bad dog down the road, the pit bull trained by the drug psycho or the Doberman that tasted human blood and liked it. Wolves are worse — everyone knows they eat children and tear farm animals to pieces. In the deepest woods, the wolves howl like doomsday, waiting to devour the careless child who wanders off in the night. You can see their eyes, coal-red and hungry, burning from the darkness at the foot of the bed or outside the windows. When you're all alone, they'll come for you. Huge. Hungry. And smarter than all hell. Don't try running. It's already too late.

- **Bugs:** Squirming, slimy, with huge horns and tearing mandibles. Did you ever wonder why girls are afraid of bugs? It's because all bugs know how to find your secret parts, the cavities and soft places where they can latch on with their poisoned fangs and burrow inside, digging deep until no doctor (not even *the* doctor!) can pry them away. And then they start to munch, slowly, painfully, spreading venom through your belly as they tunnel inward toward your heart. Don't look down — there are spiders on your shoes. Don't look up — the bees are unhappy with you for breaking their nest, and they're not good with apologies. Bugs are everywhere. Even in bed...

- **Scaryman:** Didn't they tell you never to talk to strangers? Didn't they? Now look what you've done. The Scaryman awaits, with his smile full of razors and his flapping black coat. Sometimes he's a bum, a Chester Molester from the seedy part of town. Sometimes he's a monster, like the ones Big Brother watches on TV with his friends. Sometimes he's a cop, with a can full of mace and a studded billy club. Sometimes he's Daddy, or Uncle Fred or Grandpa. The Scaryman has many faces, and some of them look too familiar...

- **The War:** What tumbles from the sky in war-torn lands, killing brothers, sisters, friends, parents? What pounds upon the door in the middle of the night, howling orders or kicking it to splinters, dragging Daddy off to the Scream Hotel? What buzzes in the corner like an insect full of shrapnel and a voice like a thousand thunders? The children of Belfast, of Sarajevo, of Somalia and East L. A. know the monster's name. It is War.

War makes the air too thick to breathe, makes fathers choke on their own blood while mothers cower under soldiers' blows. War makes the night explode with screams and makes the market dance into flying bits of glass and bodies. War makes your belly howl and grinds your fingertips to bloody shreds, *as* tanks rumble by. Worst of all, War grows inside you, scraping your soul until one day you feed the War with broken bodies. This is perhaps the saddest, meanest spirit in the Tellurian — the child's dream of War in all its glory,

In the Land of Nod, the War descends from above, like a great black cloud settling down upon the landscape. More a storm than a monster, it ravages an area, then moves on. The War begins as a darkening, then dry winds and the distant sound of sirens fill the air. In moments, the area swarms with soldiers. A red haze builds from the ground up, a bloody fog that clings to the skin and turns the stomach. Horrors begin, pain without measure, without substance, without reason. Soon enough, it subsides. Subsides into the stillness of death, and the promise of more to come...

And speaking of death...

The Underworld's Dream Theatre

We sheltered here,

But now the tide of beauty

Has dispersed

We once we home

But now are cast away

The ballrooms caved

The pillars crumbled into dust

And we are playing still

The chords to call the angels

To their thrones

-The Changelings, "Earthquake at Versailles"

Hi there. Are you awake? No? Doesn't much matter. Either you're going to read this during the day, and then dismiss it as so much drug-addled garbage, or you'll read it while you're asleep and promptly forget it when you wake up.

I don't know why I even bother.

Okay, well, I do know why — something about enlightening our brethren. (Hah! Whose lame piece of irony was that? *Tres, tres gauche!*) Still, it's not like you'll listen to me, or believe me if you do. Nobody ever believes poor old Malcolm.

Yes, yes, that's me. Malcolm. I'm a mage. Bibbity-bobbity-boo and you're sitting on a lily pad croaking out beer commercials and all that. Lucky me, I've been told that I have to tell you all about the Dream Realms of the Dead, the little dream theaters where the ghosts like to put on summer stock renditions of *Oklahoma* and *Carousel*.

Damn straight I'm being petulant about this whole thing. Look, I've been to the dreamscapes, you've been to



the dreamscapes — hell, probably everyone you know has been to the dreamscapes. Let me amend that: Everyone you know who has a vaguely interesting personality. That makes it, what, three, possibly four of your acquaintances? No family members, I'm sure.

So, where to start? The beginning.' Why not. Listen closely, as I'm not in the habit of repeating myself.

Sandmen

The first thing I have to tell you about is the Sandmen. No, put the bloody comic hook down, you literal-minded jerk. I mean the dead ones. The ghosts. Yes, they call themselves Sandmen, and I have no idea why. In any case, that's not important. What is important is that they like to swoop in on people who are asleep, ever so gently ease them out of their bodies, and carry them off to dreamland. The thing is, even people like me (I am not trying to snub you, I have no idea if you're Awakened or not, so get your knickers right back out of that twist) who can sometimes see ghosts can't always see those phantoms coming. I mean, generally they don't swing by until you're asleep anyway, so it's not much good looking for them in any case, but you know what... Excuse me? I'm rambling? Never mind.

What I was trying to say before being so rudely interrupted was that while you probably won't see a Sandman coming, you will be able to see him (or her, or it) after

you've been swaddled away on wings of dream. There isn't a general look to them, really, but they all seem to go to the same tailor. Most of them are wrapped in bits of old dreams and whatnot, making them perfect tatterdemalions. The newer the piece of dream they're wrapped in, the more brightly it glows. Some of them look like positive fireflies, I tell you.

The Places You'll Go

Once a Sandman has abstracted you from your body, there are two places he might take you. Unfortunately, neither is a little cafe in Paris, with the almond trees blossoming and a violinist on the Rue nearby and... I'm rambling again, aren't I? Well, sorry.

The first place they might take you is the land of the dead, which they quaintly call The Underworld. It's not a pretty place, and the property values are through the legendary floor. Someone who gets carted off by ghosts into these Deadlands ends up as a sort of super-tourist ghost herself, being entirely too buff to be so much as dented by most pesky wraiths. The ghosts can tell when a visitor is still alive, you see, and generally they give the living wide berths. Jealous, probably.

However, most Sandmen aren't in to just playing tour guide. No, when they ghostnap a mortal (Is that the right word? Is that a word at all? Who cares!) usually it's for

purposes of their — hold your breath now, here comes the big announcement — ahem, for purposes of their *Art*. That's with the capital and the italic, in case you were wondering. No, it's not some sort of magical ghostly word, it's just that even dead people can be pretentious angst-ridden bastards.

What these Sandmen are best at, you see, is creating what they call dreamscapes. They make little worlds, little stages that exist *outside* of this Underworld of theirs, and which ghosts dream their way into. Think about it: Any place, any time, any setting — even the dead need vacations, you see.

Plus, those clever little Sandmen stock their setting with actors, plots, props and whatnot. Mostly the actors are other ghosts — union regulations, as I understand it — but every so often, they pull a living person in there as "This Week's Special Guest Star." Usually the poor idiot has no idea what's going on. All he knows is that he's in a particularly vivid dream. Often the wraiths just gather to watch the star of the Pageant wander from mishap to mishap, much like a situation comedy. Other times they like to take active parts, and the living man (or woman, or bunches of each — the Sandmen aren't picky) becomes one of a host of characters. It varies,

Dreamscapes

The landscape of a dream is called its dreamscape. The term holds for the real estate of any dream, whether one that the Sandmen construct brick by brick or a construction worker's catnap vision of a tropical paradise. Sandmen can work with the very reality of dreams, you see — yours, mine, their own — and mold it to their wishes. It is a power that most mages, vampires, and other various and sundry Awakened beings would simply *kill* to have. However, most draw the line at dying for it. Pity.

Most dreamscapes have all the staying power of a soap bubble balanced on a sea urchin in the middle of a hurricane, which is to say not much. Someone closes her eyes, dreams a little dreamy dream (which, incidentally, calls a dreamscape into being) and then wakes up. Poof! The dreamscape's gone. End of story.

On the other hand, when the Sandmen build a dreamscape, they build it to last. They're much like the BBC, I'm led to understand, constantly recycling sets with just a little tweak to things to make it look a teensy bit different. Apparently the bloody things are too much work for a Sandman to make and then just discard when he's done. So, whatever metaphysical place they reside in is stoked to the gills, I'm sure, with abandoned and mothballed dreamscapes, as well as the ones that the Sandmen use a tad more frequently.

Furthermore, when you're in a dreamscape, somehow you're not in the Underworld at all any more. That

doesn't mean that your Spheres work any better there — how things work depends on the individual dreamscape. Each one has its own rules, depending upon the intent of the dream crafted. Don't go looking for your silly little Life spells to help you out too much in the Horror Show, for example — unless the wraith running that particular nightmare wants you to have a fighting chance.

Oh, incidentally, don't get killed in a dreamscape. Bad things happen, very bad things, and even the Sandmen can't control the nightmare you fall into. The wraiths call them Harrowings, and frankly, they just suck.

Don't ask me how it works. I've got no idea. I'm just telling you what is,

Famous Dreamscapes

There are four or five dreamscapes that simply everybody in the land of the dead knows about. That doesn't mean that they've actually been there, or even have the vaguest notion of what the place is like, but rather that everyone knows the place's name and what it's supposed to be like. Even I haven't seen them all, but here are brief rundowns as to the popular rumors.

- The Horror Show: Trust me, you don't want to be there. I've seen it and it's worse every time I go back. The Horror Show is a generic setting for all sorts of nightmarish Pageants, with little sub-enclaves of weirdness. So you've got your brooding Gothic dungeon here, your Lovecraftian backwoods town there, your splattered urban hatescape over there — you name it. Even worse than the ambiance, though, are the inhabitants. There are Sandmen who've taken up permanent residence, more or less, and spend their afterlives just playing parts in nightmare after nightmare. They look the part these days, too — you can hardly tell they were human souls once.

- Amphitheatre of the Elders: Now this one, nobody besides the Sandmen themselves has ever seen. Supposedly, it looks like the great theater at Athens, the one they used for the Dionysiac festivals, but in perfect repair. All the high muckety-mucks of the Sandmen use it as a meeting point for private business, or so the rumor goes. Very few Sandmen ever find their way to the Amphitheatre, only the most deeply trusted.

- The Boudoir: Yes, this is where they do *those* dreams. Even the dead get a little... anxious sometimes, and this is where the best Pageants to sate those wonderful fleshly urges take place. Most of these aren't for large audiences, mind you, they're more intimate performances. The heart of this little dreamscape is a romantic beach where it's always sunset, the seagulls never crap on your head, and the sand never gets into embarrassing places. Plus, there's the requisite green meadows, over-decorated bedrooms, crashing waterfalls and premade flower leis for strategic placement. One end of the dreamscape

has a sunset, the other has a moonrise. Essentially, any cornball romantic fantasy you can imagine has been built into this particular patch of dreamscape by snickering Sandmen for the pleasure of the voyeuristic dead.

• **Knossos:** Rumors of this place puzzle me. It's a maze, a giant, cyclopean maze, and the Sandmen have stocked it with monsters. Yet it's not decorated like the palace at Knossos, like any sane person would expect. No bulls, no giant columns, none of that is anywhere in evidence. Instead, it's an endless maze loaded with boojums, snarks and other unpleasant things, which the Sandmen insist upon descending into repeatedly. I've no idea of its purpose, but if you've ever had one of those horrible dreams about being completely lost in a labyrinth with no way out, you've probably seen Knossos.

• **The Mere:** Changelings simply must have had something to do with this place. It's magical, and it's the only one of these places that I enjoy dreaming of. Small compared to, say, Knossos, the Mere is simply a pool in the midst of some woods. It's always night there, with a full moon over the trees and a tapestry of stars dotting the sky. The willows on the pond banks are full and lush, and behind them is verdure. As for the lake? Perfection. It's mirror smooth, and depending upon the mood of the "author," either wreathed in milk-white mist or perfectly reflective. I highly recommend you dream of it one night when they're holding a ball upon its surface. Waltzing with a queen 400 years dead whilst the mist wreaths your ankles and the ghostly musicians play... you could do worse.

So here it is. I've told you absolutely everything I know, which isn't that much. Now you know it too. Pleasant dreams.

Paradox Realms



Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go.

- William Shakespeare, Hamlet

When I think of Paradox Realms, I think of those spiders that live underwater within bubbles of their own trapped air and spittle. Many such Realms exist in the Deep Umbra, floating there like blisters. Why anyone would want to go near them is beyond me. Not to contradict myself, of course, but that's what I do. I study and document Paradox Realms in the hope of someday better understanding them, of freeing those already trapped within them and finding a way for us to avoid Paradox altogether.

My name is Alexandro Manuella and I head a Sons of Ether team whose main goal is to better understand Paradox through in-depth study of these Realms. We watch and learn. From time to time, we have become actively involved in a Realm, and sometimes even have managed to free the mage trapped within, thus bursting the bubble and relieving the Tellurian of an irritation. Each Realm must be treated as a unique enigma to be solved. Herein lies the true challenge of what we do. Preconceptions hold no sway here.

The cosmological causes, effects and locations of such Realms have already been treated upon elsewhere in this book. I have been asked to describe three Paradox Realms in particular: the one that's been around the longest, the one that's the biggest, and the one that's the baddest. Dozens more, perhaps hundreds more exist, strung between the Horizon and the Void like shimmering Christmas ornaments. For a while, perhaps as long as a month on so, Earth time, the mage imprisoned in such a Realm may ponder the actions he committed to bring him to this fate. If he does, the Realm frees him and disappears; oddly enough, the victim returns straight to Earth when this happens, although his "trajectory" may land him in another part of the world. After

a relatively short time, however, these "ornaments" disentangle themselves from their Earthly connections and drift away into space. The chances of returning from a Paradox Realm after that occurs are slim indeed,

Rungnir's Crib

The first is Rungnir's Crib, the oldest Paradox Realm we have recorded. Can you imagine the gaffe this Rungnir must have committed in order to create a Paradox Realm first discovered over 1,000 years ago and still going strong? Theories have been flying for centuries, some plausible, some totally ridiculous. What *do* we know? We know that Rungnir was a Viking chieftain. The markings on his body tell us that. We know that he was dealing with Life magick; the nature of the Paradox tells us that. And we know that he's never coming out. The look on his face tells us that.

This Paradox Realm is not only one of the oldest, it is also one of the most intriguing. Because it's been around for so long, we can gain insight into the way Paradox Realms change as time passes. Rungnir's Crib has evolved over the centuries. An account by its discoverer indicates that it was once a large Realm, vast enough for its discoverer to enter and walk around, while Rungnir hung inside it. In recent decades, we have watched it shrink down until it clings to Rungnir's body like a second skin,

Inside this Umbral amniotic sack that is his Realm, Rungnir is conceived, grows, passes through infancy to old age, dies, turns to a pile of dust and then is conceived again. All of this occurs within a matter of days. Some Scientists believe that centuries of this have driven Rungnir mad. Others don't agree, however; my colleagues and I think that Rungnir's repeating life has merely confused him. He exhibits no signs of insanity during any of his youth or adult stages. He gives no outward indication that he's in pain or that he cares about what's happening to him. Having been



reborn time and again, his identity has conformed to the Paradox. This is not the same as insanity. However, it also means that he will never strive to break from the Realm in which he is imprisoned. He does not learn throughout his lifetimes. On the contrary, it would seem that his personality has been subverted, made malleable by the recurring cycle of life. I believe he has forgotten his original life.

Several of my colleagues have been working with him on this. They take turns putting various stimuli before his staring eyes. They stay with him from the moment he experiences his "birth" to the moment he dies. Using items and flash cards, they hope to rebuild his thought processes and bring his consciousness back to life. They know this will take some time, possibly thousands of his lifetimes, but their ultimate goal remains: to return him to the point where he will understand his predicament and make an attempt to save himself. He's making progress; he smiled the other day. With luck, they will soon have him thinking.

Entering the Realm is actually possible, though not recommended. One Scientist, reaching out to touch Rungnir, found his hand passing through the outer skin and into Rungnir himself. Before he could cry out, the rest of his body was nearly pulled in as well. One of his companions managed to grab his leg and yank him back out. The Scientist spent several months in a fetal position, sucking his thumb and rocking himself back and forth. To this day, he refuses to discuss his experience in Rungnir's Crib.

Fleckman's Folly

The largest Paradox Realm we've discovered to date is Fleckman's Folly. It is located in the Umbra, near the San Andreas Fault. A mage by the name of Theodore Fleckman brought it into existence when he used the Sphere of Entropy in an attempt to make California fall into the ocean. He had purchased a ton of land on what would become the new beach. Needless to say, he was insane long before he ended up in his own personal hell.

Fleckman's Folly is shaped like a sausage, 100.5 kilometers long and 13.26 kilometers wide. Although it has shrunk by an average of 15 square kilometers per year since its creation in 1906, it's still a huge snag in the fabric of the Tellurian. From outside, the Realm gives a panoramic view of an arid landscape. A huge crevasse cuts along the length of the land, parallel to the long axis of the Realm. To enter the Realm, you merely step in at any point.

Once inside, a visitor immediately notices the change from sedate landscape to cataclysmic danger zone. The ground is in a permanent state of flux; the land heaves and bucks. Large chunks of stone and soil thrust forth from beneath the surface, dislodging boulders and sprays of dirt. It's extremely difficult to stand in Fleckman's Folly and even harder to get out alive. Whether Fleckman is still here or not remains unanswered. No one has ever seen him, although it's not inconceivable that he is buried somewhere in the layers of rock and dirt and that he will someday come pushing up as the ground overturns itself.

Amnesia

That brings us to the baddest of all Paradox Realms. Even I will never set foot in this Realm. Two out of three who did came back completely scrambled. We don't know exactly how this Realm came into existence and we still don't agree on its nature. Most of my peers believe that it was formed when a mage misused the Sphere of Mind. I, however, have reached a different conclusion.

Mages who end up here — and there have been a good many, I can attest — suffer from a form of complete amnesia. I've interviewed many people who either purposely or inadvertently wandered into Amnesia and have no recollection of who they are or why they are here. Some have returned to Sleep, their Awakenings totally forgotten. This fact alone tells me that Amnesia is not connected to Mind Arts; simple Mind Effects cannot undo Awakening.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews with these survivors have shown a pattern psychosis in which they believe themselves to be someone other than who they are — different career, different race, different sex. Their memories seem complete and well-constructed. Some of my colleagues have suggested reincarnation might explain this phenomenon, theorizing that the total loss of memory for this lifetime has caused the mages' minds to seek back and grasp onto the most recent lifetime that they do remember.

I disagree with this theory. I think this Paradox Realm was formed by a combination of Spheres including two, or all, of the following: Spirit, Correspondence, and/or Time. This phenomenon, this combination of elements, rarely occurs in a Paradox Realm. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to state that it is rarely diagnosed correctly. In Amnesia, these poor souls are yanked from their bodies and switched with people from different times and different places. This has serious implications for those amnesia sufferers out there in the world. Are they also victims of this Paradox Realm? Have they been abducted from their everyday lives and placed in

a strange body in the middle of the Umbra? No wonder most of them go into shock the moment they begin to realize that something has changed.

Mages who have come out of Amnesia with their lives and minds intact have described an odd, surrealistic place. A haziness hangs over everything, not quite a fog, but enough to make it difficult to perceive exactly what is occurring. Colors melt together and converge to form a moving picture. People form in the colors, now dressed in business suits, now dressed in military uniforms, now dressed in cowboy chaps. Here a horse and buggy drive by, followed by a blue Corvette and a black Model T. Skyscrapers turn into teepees and igloos into ranch houses. A witch burning at the stake changes, mutates into a girl in a red sequined dress, then she melts into a little boy in a red wagon. No one of who exits Amnesia with his memory intact can describe the Realm any better.

One bit of information recurs consistently across all the varying descriptions of the Realm. All visitors describe seeing an angel. They say that she floats above them, a halo of golden hair upon her head, her gauzy white robes flowing out around her. They describe her wings as pure white, always extended, and thick with feathers. We have named her *Amnasthai*, from the Greek, and we believe her to be the Realm's Paradox Spirit. Only one report exists of her appearance outside her Realm. At that time, she descended upon a mage, wrapped him in her arms and carried him away into the Umbra. We assume, now, that she brought him here.

Multitudes of other Paradox Realms exist; some continue, like the ones I've just described, long after their origins, while most simply seal themselves up and float away into the depths of the Deep Umbra. While we make what efforts we can to free those imprisoned within the Realms, I caution all readers to avoid the very phenomena which bring such places into being. When you use magick, do so wisely and with good intentions. The ravaged victims of Paradox I have met or seen from afar are all the object lesson I need.

The Hollow World



Proponents of alternative realities are not scientists and shouldn't try to be scientists — they are artists and mythmakers for a constantly changing culture, and should be respected for their abilities as poets, shamans, tricksters, and storytellers.

—Walter Kafton-Minkel, *Subterranean Worlds*

Publish or perish they say in academic circles. I suppose this qualifies? Well, no matter; the important thing is to disseminate the information as widely as possible among the Traditions. We may still be in time—barely.

I am Professor Geode. That isn't my real name, of course, but that hardly matters at this point. I hold several degrees from prominent universities and am a fellow in a number of eminent

societies. Most importantly, I am a geologist, an inveterate caver (*not* a spelunker; those amateurs are always having to be rescued by cavers!), and a member in good standing of the Sons of Ether. I have published in *Paradigma* and many other notable journals.

Those damnable dead-worlders of the Void Engineers almost managed to wipe the place out once, closing off the only known entries. They've been sniffing around again now that other paths to the truth have been discovered, and it's only a matter of time until they find the entrances to the Inner Earth and start mapping it out of existence the way they did outer space. We can't allow that to happen. Not this time. The Inner Earth is far too important.

They've already convinced most people that the Earth is nothing more than a molten core covered with miles of rock.

- The Professor Speaks

The following is a transcription from a taped journal entry. Professor Geode kindly consented to an interview but regretted that writing everything out would take far too much precious research time. Even so, I thank him for his insights and can only hope that someday I manage to make it to this fantastic world he describes.

Brief Note: My collaborator and co-editor Dindaine has theorized that the Hollow Earth is, in fact, the Shade Realm of Matter. Going by the "alternative Umbra" thesis that Professor Geode professes, I think she may have a point. There certainly seems to be a connection between the two; if nothing else, we may assume that portals link both Realms together. Were either of them once part of our Earth? I think it's likely. Perhaps the Professor will someday provide the necessary link that helps us to understand their interconnection.

But maybe that'd take all the fun out of it.

They've used their instruments to measure it, assay its contents and to formulate theories of plate tectonics. But the Hollow Earth is a true and verifiable fact. That pale imitation Horizon Realm masquerading as the Inner Earth may have been intended to salvage what we could when the Void Engineers succeeded in closing the polar openings for a time, but hardly holds a candle to the real thing. Like the better-known Umbra of Earth, which overlays the physical reality of the planet and atmosphere itself, the Hollow Earth is an Inner Umbra, which overlaps the material substance of the Earth's interior, occupying the same space, but accessible only to those whose world-view can encompass such a vision. Imagine! A whole new Umbra *inside* the Earth, and we may be the first to recognize it as such. That has become my life's work, you see.

You may believe me when I say that the World Wide Web has nothing on the web of tunnels, roadways, caverns and passages to be found under the surface of the Earth. Many lead nowhere, of course. But the others — those are the exciting ones, and they lead to worlds you can barely imagine.

Before I continue any further, let me assure you that I have thoroughly checked the seals within and without my laboratory, which is lined with successive layers of steel, concrete, lead, glass and aluminum to ensure that the thought rays of the dero will not penetrate. The dero? I shall explain about them in due time.

Entering Inner Earth

I've often thought Lewis Carroll had the right of it. While it seems as though crossing the Gauntlet into the High Umbra is a matter of will and skill, the Inner Earth can apparently be entered by any fool who happens to fall through the correct hole. By this, I mean to say that physical

entry into the Hollow Earth is not only possible but, in fact, more likely than a spirit crossing. The Gauntlet separating the Outer Earth from its Inner Umbra is frightfully thin in places, more like a Nebulous Curtain than an actual barrier.

This phenomenon exists, no doubt, because of the persistence of rumors and first-hand experiences among many of the un-Awakened. Not all the stories of lost worlds, secret underground alien strongholds or encounters with elder races come from the annals of our Tradition. Many are verified by so-called "crack-pots" and science fiction writers who have achieved some sort of contact with denizens of the Inner Earth.

I digress from my original intention of enumerating the various methods for entering the Inner Earth. Let me begin anew.

First, and most importantly, you must understand that the Inner or Hollow Earth is not a singular Realm that can be reached through a particular mode of travel. It is a whole Umbra, while many places within that Umbra share certain characteristics, most are as diverse and amazing as the rest of the Tellurian. Like Dr. Who's TARDIS, what's inside is bigger than what's on the outside, and only a fool would claim to know more than a tiny corner of that vast region—or even most of the entrances to it. Further, the portals that lead to the Inner Earth are never obvious; most people simply walk around them, never realising that a slightly different perspective would allow them to walk *through*, giving them entry into a most wondrous Realm beneath their feet.

Those who aspire to enter the Inner Umbra may avail themselves of either physical or non-physical routes. Both the north and south poles still retain their ethereal connection to the Inner Earth—the so-called "holes at the poles"—despite persistent attempts to transform them out of existence. Relying on compasses and such instrumentation is, of course, useless, though Ether goggles work smashingly for showing the true route into the interior. Certain volcanoes and underwater passageways also provide access, although they present unique navigational challenges. One of the most unusual entries is through the sub-basement of a building in New York City, accessible only through a certain elevator. Those pushing the correct combination of buttons bypass the basement, exiting deep within a cavern that leads downward into Inner Earth. That route is not recommended, however, as it passes quite close to a dero lair.

From my own experience, however, traversing the vast system of tunnels that lies beneath the surface of the Earth provides the surest means of penetrating the Nebulous Curtain and gaining entry to the Inner Realms. These once stretched in an unbroken series from China through India and up into Europe, under the oceans, up the length of South America and on into Canada. Various shiftings of earth, due to earthquakes and the birth of new volcanoes, have broken the ancient tunnels into pieces, sealing off many of the doorways. It is no longer possible to enter the warren in Asia and emerge in America, though by traveling through an Inner Earth Realm

to another tunnel opening, such a journey is feasible — and may be quicker, as distances are not always the same inside as they are outside. In the end, it is all a matter of choosing the correct route to lead you where you want to go.

For example, one entrance through the north pole leads to a pangaeanic paradise of dinosaurs, mammoths and jungle growth that we have catalogued as *Biotopia*, or Lost World No. 3. Taking another direction leads to the forgotten land of Eden where a race of enlightened giants dwells at the crossing of four great rivers. The south pole entryway transports a traveler to *Rainbow City*, a highly evolved outpost of *Agharta*, which is itself, another inner Realm. Agharta was once a Utopian land inhabited by the mystickal Goro monks, and has been chronicled by Joe "Lucky Skunk" Ross, who popularized the exploits of Doc Eon and his Terrific Trio. The roads to Agharta include an entry through the north pole, a deep cavern system in Tibet and an ancient underground roadway in Peru. Though no one has visited that Realm since the end of World War II, it is generally believed that several prominent Nazi scientists escaped to Agharta and set up secret laboratories and factories there designed to bring about the Fourth Reich in the near future. We can only hope that the mystickal Mind magick of the Goro monks is able to keep them in check long enough for us to reestablish communications with the Realm.

The Arianni, Atlanteans and Lemurians who live in various communities within the Hollow Earth may also offer travelers rides in their craft, which surface dwellers have lumped into a category referred to as UFOs. The more gullible Sleepers may believe they have been taken to Mars or Venus, but in actuality, they've never really left the Earth.

As can be seen from these examples, those wishing to travel underground physically should either know where they're going or be willing to take their chances in the name of True Science and exploration. There are, of course, other ways.

For the more traditional among us, the Nebulous Curtain can be crossed utilizing those Spheres we employ to cross the other Gauntlet. This apparently has the same effect as when used in the Outer Umbra, transforming us into spirit (as opposed to falling through holes and visiting the place in the flesh, as it were). The really exciting transport into the Hollow Earth, however, is via Innercraft. Based on some of the same technology as our Etherships, the Innercraft travels through the ether that permeates the Inner Earth. Crossing the Nebulous Curtain, the Innercraft travels through and is fueled by the radiant energy generated by the interior sun.

The Inner Realms

Although I have devoted my life to the exploration of the Inner Umbra, my knowledge of the myriad Realms that lie beyond the Nebulous Curtain is far from exhaustive. The following excerpts from my travel journal detail three of the Realms I have visited personally.

One factor is common to all the inner worlds: the interior sun, which is called the "Smoky God" by some of the inhabitants of the Earth's inner Realms. This sun is not always visible as a ball of energy. In some areas, it is perceived only as a strange luminescence that lends light and heat to the inner world; in others, it rises and falls (or seems to) just as the exterior sun does. In a few, the interior sun is always visible in the sky, bathing the whole Realm in a never-ending noontime glow.

My travels have not been extensive enough as yet for me to determine whether each of the Realms occupies its own little niche (such as is found in other Umbra! Realms), whether they are part of a continuous, though divided, whole that overlays the inner surface of the Earth (as if adhering to the underside of the rock strata), or if each constitutes a sort of orbiting planet set into the ether which surrounds the interior sun. I do know that gravity works differently in different Realms, and it's best to know which Realm you are in before you attempt to leap *down* and end up throwing yourself into the sun!

Biotopia (Lost World No. 3)

The extravagance of this Edenic Realm immediately assaults all the senses upon one's emergence into what can only be described as "paradise." The word "green" hardly begins to describe the thousand gradations of verdant color present in the thick, all-enveloping foliage. Here and there, bright swatches of purple, yellow, crimson and blue threaten to overload eyes just beginning to adjust to the startling realization that the outer world pales in comparison to this inner cornucopia of color.

The air here is moist and fragrant with the odor of living matter: the aromatic bouquet of floral and herbal essences, the tangy musk of the animal denizens, the thick, almost tangible smell of unpolluted soil and the redolence of natural entropic decay. Permeating all is a freshness that remains untainted by the reek of exhaust fumes or chemical contamination. The temperature is pleasant, remaining around 75 degrees year round, though the rainy season lasts for four months and soaks everything thoroughly.

At first, all seems quiet. The noises associated with the hustle and bustle of the modern world are, thankfully, absent from this Realm. But the silence is only a mask for the true symphonic display of sounds that form a constant accompaniment to travels in Biotopia. The call of the dinosaur, the trumpet of the woolly mammoth, the predatory shriek of the prehistoric raptor, all punctuate the steady drone of the insects and smaller avians who populate this grandest of jungles.

Dangers lurk here as well as beauty, of course. It could hardly be otherwise in what is basically a prehistoric preserve, though one with more modern flora and fauna intermixed with earlier species. One of the tallest ferns is covered with hair-fine fronds that can cut like a knife, and

the loveliest black and purple orchid exudes a poisonous sort of pollen (or lack of a better term) that can blind or choke someone unwary enough to smell it. Distant rumblings and deep red clouds against the sky tell of the unrest of Borotoku, a not-quite-extinct volcano that dominates the landscape. Brilliant blue butterflies with wings that reach three feet across share the skies with frightful fanged pterosaurs whose wingspans can reach 50 feet. Lovely proto-horses gallop through the open grassy parts of the Realm while a peaceful, plant-eating camptosaurus is grasped and ripped apart by a 24-foot-tall, sword-toothed allosaurus.

Though the dinosaurs are the most impressive danger in Biotopia, the native tribes that inhabit this Realm pose their own menace to travelers unused to dealing with societies whose customs and mores differ vastly from modern surface society. Just as now-extinct creatures have found a haven in Biotopia, cultures which have passed from existence upon the Earth seem to thrive in its fertile embrace. It is almost as if the Realm has extended an invitation to all those forgotten and "lost" societies whose grandeur preceded our own and which, shamefully to say, have been destroyed by the greed of Technocratic exploiters. Either that, or else Biotopia is, in fact, the seed from which surface life germinated.

Background

The creation stories of many ancient cultures begin with the saga of how their people arrived upon the Earth's surface after a journey from deep within its inner core, crawling from the womb of Mother Earth to claim the outer world as their birthright. Many of those who refused to leave their primal home and insisted on remaining behind became transformed into monstrous parodies of their true selves, warped by the convulsive "birth pangs" of the Earth. When, later, the defeated remnants of those noble peoples who'd traveled surfaceward retreated from a world that no longer allowed their existence, they found themselves confronted by the now-savage descendants of their ancestors. Thus, despite the diverse outer trappings which speak of a plethora of bygone cultures, there now exist within Biotopia two main groups of intelligent beings: the Ogoni, those who never left and who devolved into cannibalistic savages, and the Wybassa, those who returned to their first home after their cultures were destroyed. This state of affairs has transformed Biotopia into a battleground between two fundamentally opposed ways of life.

Places of Interest

• The Modassai (Mother of Jungles)

The Wybassa name for Biotopia is *Modassai* or "Mother of Jungles." It is an apt description of this enormous rain forest. Like its Earthly counterparts, this jungle runs thickest along river courses and hunting trails, which are the only two means of travel within the forest itself. Within the jungle,

several layers of canopy overlap, as tall trees eclipse smaller trees and are themselves topped by yet taller species. Lianas, mosses, trellis plants and the like encircle the massive tree trunks and string together the lower canopy like giant spider webs. This is the home of the great cats and the smaller reptiles, the birds and insects, the apes and the rodents. The dinosaurs rarely come here, though several tribes of Wybassa and Ogoni have staked claim to aerial homes in the middle and lower canopies, where they have carved out game trails.

Inside the encircling jungle, the heavy foliage thins out and travel at ground level is possible, as relatively few plants except for giant fungi thrive in the deep twilight. Most intelligent creatures avoid the jungle floor, however; traveling along it invites attack from hidden enemies above. Some few drops of rain penetrate the leaves; the sunlight rarely does.

• The Valley of Dinosaurs

The Valley of the Dinosaurs is really a misnomer, somewhat akin to calling Kansas a farm. The area is actually a vast bowl-like plain with tall grasses, rolling hills and stands of tall trees. The plain is cut by two major rivers, which flow from a mountainous area of the nearby great rainforest and from a series of stark cliffs which border the valley to the north. Also, the Valley of Dinosaurs features a large swamp and the awesome, singular presence of Borotoku, the Smoking Mountain. This vast area, which eventually slopes down to a calm, glassy sea, is the home of numerous dinosaurs, mammoths and prehistoric water creatures. The dinosaurs, some of which reach 90 feet in length, are the lords of the valley.

Travel across this region requires extreme caution. The terrain itself poses physical obstacles, though it remains far easier to negotiate than the Modassai. The chief dangers arise from attracting the attention of the valley's predatory beasts or straying into the path of one of the larger herbivores (many of whom do not notice the pesky squirming "lump" beneath their massive feet). Stampedes also pose a threat to travelers in parts of the valley inhabited by herd animals, while attempts to navigate the rivers often lead to unfortunate encounters with plesiosaurs and oversized river serpents.

• The Smoking Mountain

Borotoku rises over 6,000 feet from the plains which form the Valley of Dinosaurs. The volcano, which the natives call "the Angry One," is a huge cone of deepest black, zigzagged with streaks of red lava. A deep crimson glow lights the sky around the volcano, which frequently belches forth clouds of deadly black smoke, cinders and ash. Stories abound of Ogoni sacrifices to their "mountain king," and range from the usual tales of captives cast into the burning caldera to unfortunates being staked out and burned alive piece by piece. In the latter case, the heads are said to be preserved and thrown into the volcano as the offering the "god" desires. No one has verified the stories, to my knowledge.

- Village of the Fisherfolk

One group of Wybassa live along the banks of the *Kokoniwaba*, "the Great Serpent River," which snakes its way through mile upon mile of the Modassai. The *Kokoni*, or Serpent Folk, live on the bounty provided by the river. Their few crops are nourished when the river floods nutrients into the soil. The *Kokoni* initially appear to be quite frightening, for they are a serpent-headed people. While they have hair (which they dress elaborately, somewhat like ancient Egyptians), their skin is made up of tiny scales like those of serpents. Additionally, their eyes are slitted like those of snakes and include a nictitating membrane. Most disconcerting is the length of their split tongues, which they use to display certain emotions or to clarify the meaning of their speech to one another. They found my lack of such an appendage a great disadvantage in comprehending whatever I tried to say to them. They speak some few surface languages, but with a lisping accent which renders their speech almost incomprehensible to the uninitiated.

The *Kokoni* use spears and nets to capture fish, turtles and river fowl. Turtle shells become their bowls, small implements and jewelry, feathers serve as decoration and as filler for their mattresses, and river plants provide them with pulp which they beat into a kind of felt for their clothing. Men and women share all duties, with each taking turns hunting, farming, fishing, crafting and caring for children. Their society is built on mutual trust and community. Lying,

cheating and stealing are seen as terrible acts against the best interests of the tribe as a whole, and *Kokoni* who engage in such behavior are either exiled or killed.

The *Kokoni* revere river snakes, though the reptiles are quite poisonous, and keep many within their homes - woven reed shelters they build along the river bank. These folk brew deadly poisons, which they use to tip their spears when they hunt big game or fight enemies. If a tribe member is bitten by one of the river snakes, it is because she is *zankoru* (unclean). If she recovers, she has repented; if not, she needed to return to the serpent father to renew her spirit. They make no antidote for the snake's venom and consider the idea of doing so repulsive. Yearly festivals in honor of the serpent are held, with dancing and singing followed by days of feasting. During the rainy season, the *Kokoni* move their belongings onto platforms built up in the trees and drop nets and fishing lines into the water below. They keep canoes in the upper branches of the trees, using them only when the flood waters make travel on foot impossible.

- Caves of the Misshapen

Overlooking the Valley of Dinosaurs stands an escarpment honeycombed with caves. The *Pokotan*, one tribe of Ogoni, make their homes here. Some of the largest caves reach far inside the cliff and lead to underground water. While surprisingly dry and inviting as dwellings, these caves are extremely hazardous to those who live inside them. Though they seem to offer the perfect haven for the



savage Ogoni, in fact the cave walls emit toxic levels of radioactive materials. The tribe has undergone massive mutations, resulting in terrible deformities, depressed intelligence and heightened aggressiveness. Whether they jealously seek to make all others like themselves, or whether they believe that warping others is some sort of holy duty is not known. In either case, the Pokotan kidnap and torture outsiders, twisting them into deformed shapes akin to their own. Such torments include breaking bones, hacking off limbs and other gruesome practices, that often twist the captives' minds as well. Once such captives are sufficiently changed, they are bred into members of the tribe (assuming they survive the initial torture) or sacrificed to the Pokotani gods.

Ecology

Biotopia exhibits a complex ecosystem made possible only by the constant presence of the never-setting inner sun. Biotopia's moisture-laden atmosphere combines with the constant heat generated by Borotoku and the many thermal pools to create a hothouse environment in which plants attain extraordinary size. This provides both abundant food and suitable habitats for the many herbivorous species, including dinosaurs and other creatures now extinct upon the surface. The plant-eating animals, in turn, supply meat and carrion for predatory animals and the tribal peoples who make this Realm their home.

Though the dinosaurs most often remain in their valley home, they occasionally make forays into the jungles in search of easier prey or especially tasty plants. Such incursions sometimes lead to misfortune for tribespeople. A hungry brachiosaurus may destroy entire villages while plodding toward some tantalizing growth of greenery, while an allosaurus which finds its way into the forest might savage a hunting party unlucky enough to discover it and make the fatal mistake of running.

Although the vegetation of Biotopia seems to occupy the lowest rung of the food chain, this classification is not altogether true. Plants achieve such great size in this fertile land that carnivorous species such as the Venus Fly Trap can present a very real danger to both animals and humanoids that come within their reach. On the positive side, hundreds of natural medicines abound within the Realm, merely waiting to be harvested.

The Hidden World (a.k.a. the Dero Lairs)

Doc Eon, in his travels through Agharta, became aware of a race called the *dero*. He thought they were robotic slaves to Hitler's Third Reich, little realizing the true peril they represented. In actuality, I maintain that *they* were often in control of Hitler's minions. Their plans for the people of Earth are sinister in the extreme.

Unlike Biotopia, the Hidden World does not stem out of place inside the Earth. In fact, its natural cave formations constitute one of the chief dangers in traveling the network of tunnels beneath the surface. You might be caving and come upon a deeper shaft than would normally seem possible, or swim into an underwater cavern and emerge into a dry area which led onward and downward. You might even fall down an old well and end up traversing the dero caves. Many of the old silver mines in the western United States lead into the dero complexes, as did the Lost Dutchman Mine. Emerald workings in Venezuela twist deeper and deeper beneath the surface, eventually encountering the dero caverns as well. One credible source claims that the caves at Lascaux in France have been opened to the dero by mind-controlled archaeologists. I have no doubt that governmental underground shelters in many areas are little more than fronts for nefarious dero activity.

The dero lairs are a series of interconnected caves and caverns that could plausibly exist, were it not that they remain dry and level most of the time. All really deep caves are *solution caves*, or those made by water seeking its lowest level. The water carves out passageways through limestone, sandstone or other porous rock and forms a series of passageways and rooms that slope, cut off abruptly, twist, turn, become narrow as a needle, or squeeze down into cramped, inches-high crawlspaces. If that weren't enough, literally all caves are wet, or at least damp. These aren't. The sound of water dripping, an almost constant background sound found in any large cave system, is absent. Nor are such caves dark.

Were they shored up, the caves of the Hidden World would look like mine shafts; instead, they look as though they were carved out of sheer rock by some sort of laser that squared off the corners and polished the walls to a glinting smoothness. These intersect with obviously natural caves that were considered large enough to leave "as is." Natural phenomena, such as particularly large stalactites, stalagmites and interesting rock formations, have been left as well, creating oases of art within the otherwise sterile-looking tunnels.

Rather than being cold, as caverns away from the equator should be, these caves maintain a temperature a little over 65 degrees. No plausible explanation accounts for the light which illumines all sections of the caves equally; it seems to be a luminescent quality of the air itself. And that air is fresh, as if just pumped in from the surface, rather than stagnant air trapped miles underground.

Within these eerie tunnels live two dwarflike races known as the *dero* and the *tero*. The word *dero* is short for "detrimental robots," while *tero* refers to "integrative robots." Though referred to as robots, they are not mechanical beings, but races who were once under the telepathic control of beings known as Titans. Because they thus lacked free will, they were termed "robot" races. At least, that's what poor deluded Richard Shaver believed when he chronicled his dealings with the dero in *Amazing Stories*.



Background

According to dero mythology, the Earth was once populated by beings from a distant planet, called Titans, or more commonly, *Atlans*, in honor of their first home on Earth. These beings lived thousands of years and possessed sophisticated technology that humans could only dream about. Using genetic engineering, they bred new races to serve them, including those who became our ancestors. The Titans could travel at the speed of light in their space craft and control others' thoughts using a *telaug* or telepathic augmentor. After living on Earth for some time, however, they discovered that the sun had begun emitting radioactive rays that were deadly to them. They went underground, but couldn't escape the effects even there. Finally, they left. Because there was not enough room on their craft, the robot races were left behind. Our ancestors found a way to live on the surface, but many others stayed in the caves.

A large number of these peoples, angered by their abandonment and warped by the poisonous rays, became psychotic and extremely jealous of the surface dwellers. Using the machines and devices left behind by the Titans, these dero began tormenting humankind. Their machines produce rays that can cause mass hallucinations, create illusions, instill hypnotic compulsions and even kill at a distance. I believe many of the greatest ills besetting humankind (wars, mass murders, terrible air crashes, and famines) are; really the work of the dero and their terrible

mind control devices. Despite their love of tormenting foes at a distance, the deros' greatest pleasure is to capture surface dwellers and spend years tormenting them with hallucinations, tortures and mind control. Captives are used by the dero as laborers and sex slaves as well.

The tero are few in number, and completely oppose the dero. Though they have access to only a few of their creators' devices, they use them to locate dero lairs, interfere with the deros' plans, and warn humans against the terrible threat which lies right beneath their feet. Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell simply from looking (or even a short conversation) whether one speaks to a dero or a tero. The dero are extremely clever and can trick others into doing their work for them.

Most of the above is true. One small detail, however, changes the entire story. There never *were* any Titans. May all the powers that be forgive us, the Sons of Ether created the dero. Long before we abandoned the Technocracy, we found the inner Umbra and used its freedom from Paradox to "play God" in the name of advanced Science, creating servants to ease the burdens of humankind. The devices the dero now have are constructed from plans and designs we were forced to leave behind when our creations rebelled and began slaughtering us. Only a few, the tero, remained loyal. Though they did not attack us, they didn't help either — at least not directly. The attack was swift and deadly. Once we had been routed from their

lairs, the dero used their relative immunity from Paradox to Strike at us, savaging Sleeper and Awakened alike with their hallucinations and thought rays. We abandoned our plans to retake the lairs, hoping this would deflect their anger, and it has lessened the number of attacks. They still exist, though. Pity the poor fool who falls into their clutches,

Most frightening of all, I have heard a disturbing rumor. An impeccable source tells me that the dero may have Awakened. If that is so, we must mount an effort now to wipe them out or contain their danger. If given time to develop, they will surely do the same to us.

The Storehouse of Scientific, Experimentation

Somewhere within the vast network of tunnels lies a hidden cache of tools, weapons, ships, amazing inventions, ray guns, thought transference equipment and other such wonders designed and created by our Tradition. Huge amounts of Tass have been worked into many of the Devices, and some few have the capacity to counter magick. Plans and blueprints for hundreds more also lie within the vaults. What Scientist wouldn't covet such a treasure hoard? More than simple greed for our lost treasures must motivate us now, however. We must recover *everything*, lest it be turned against the surface and our world annihilated. If your book can convince even a few of our fellow magi of the terrible danger I describe, Dr. Hastings, you will be hailed as the saviors of humankind.

Do forgive me. I tend to become quite excited concerning the dero. It is imperative that you believe me, you see. You mustn't think me mad. That would be falling right into their trap. Well, enough about that. On to the third world — one holding out great hope that we may find answers to the dero menace.

Rainbow City

While Agharta seems to have fallen into the clutches of the Nazis, one of its outposts (or perhaps an allied city; it isn't always clear where the borders are drawn) holds aloft the beacon of enlightenment and esoteric knowledge. Upon traversing the tunnels which lead down from the south pole, one can enter an enormous cavern with a burning sun in its center. Within the cavern, a river of light leads to a shining citadel that glows with all the colors of the rainbow. Suspended in the air about a mile above the cavern floor, the great crystal-clear city turns in place, presenting different facets of itself as it revolves, (flittering towers and stately domes vie for attention alongside glowing palaces and sparkling fountains. White and crimson birds circle the spires and clouds suffused with golden light drift over the buildings, alternately highlighting and shadowing them. There

appears to be no way up to the city short of flight. Those who try flying (either magickally or in ships), teleportation, or other types of easy travel are doomed to disappointment. It simply doesn't work.

In actuality, a transparent stairway twines upward from the ground to the city gates, but it remains invisible unless a seeker travels directly under the city in search of it. The ascent itself is dizzying, and the clear stairs cause most climbers anxiety. The stairway serves as a barrier or gauntlet, a test of resourcefulness, courage and resolve for those who seek the wisdom of the Hidden Masters. It is said that only those who bear no malice toward the city or its denizens can reach the top of that slender stairway.

Climbing Invisible Stairs

All who climb the stairs must make Willpower rolls (target 7) twice during the climb or freeze in place with terror. Those who are actively afraid of heights have a target of 9. Those who succeed in their rolls can help comrades who have frozen by talking to them and reassuring them, in effect inspiring them with courage. Storytellers should feel free to add other obstacles to the stairway, like darkened portions where characters must feel their way along, guardians who question travelers on the stairs and attempt to remove those they don't approve of, airborne attackers from other Realms who somehow defeat whatever device prevents others from flying near the city, or anything else that could add excitement to the climb.

At the top, the city gates open to reveal a crystalline city filled with light, laughter, music and dancing. Passersby offer luscious fruits and sparkling drinks, and the smell of incense permeates the air. Many of the women adorn their ankles with tiny bells, and all the inhabitants wear bright, colorful and attractive clothing decorated with gold and silver threads, fine needlework and intricate designs -- sort of a cross between the Arabian Nights and Mandarin Chinese. Rooms — indeed whole palaces — stand empty, awaiting whatever occupant chooses to claim them. Free food, clothing, jewelry and all the necessities of life sit a hand's reach close at hand, ready to be used.

Background

When the world began to change in response to the Technomancers' victory, many masters of magick sought a refuge where they could hide their books, their magickal workings and themselves. They looked within

and found the Rainbow City, where Hidden Masters haddwelt since time began. It is unknown whether the Hidden Masters are, in fact, the last remaining Pure Ones or just extremely long-lived sorcerers. Known as the Keepers of Ancient Knowledge, they claim alliance with the Goro monks of Agharta, yet make no move to assist that Realm in throwing off its Nazi invaders. Some claim that this Realm is actually Shamballah, and that the masters are Atlanteans or Lemurians who survived the catastrophes that destroyed those lands. Others say the Rainbow City is not a city at all, but a hallucinatory Umbral Realm ruled by powerful Umbrood who take human form because it suits them to Jo so. When necessary, the city simply fades from view, either becoming totally invisible to all senses and magickal searching, or entering some other dimension or hidden Horizon Realm of its own.

The Library of Arcane Knowledge

Among the beauties and wonders of the city, the Library of Arcane Knowledge stands out both for its purity of form and its purpose. A great crystalline block with no apparent entrances, this place supposedly serves as the repository of all human knowledge — past or future. All magickal workings, all inventions, all philosophy, science, poetry, literature — in short, everything that the human race ever thought or ever *will* think can be found inside the library. Or so they say. The Hidden Masters grant users the right to the knowledge contained therein — or refuse such requests. No explanations are ever given for their decisions, nor is there any appeal if the request is refused. Occasionally, a seeker can ask again later, once she has progressed in her understanding, and he allowed the knowledge she was denied before.

Thank you. I believe your tape has run out, and I really must get back to work.





Chapter Four: Realms of Interest

*People see things as they are and ask why. I
dream of things that never were and ask why not.*
— George Bernard Shaw

Horizon Realms



I suppose there are a few of you out there who are going to insist upon trying to visit the fortresses your fellow mages have set up and like to call Chantries. Very well. Some of them are actually lots of fun to visit. The first thing I ought to do for you is try to explain how the Horizon works. Let's see... you can think of the Horizon as the skin of the Near Umbra, if you'd like. A membrane between the Near Umbra and the Deep Umbra, keeping out all of the foreign particles just waiting to infect us.

Well, the analogy breaks down right about there, because the Horizon does far more than just protect us

from the predations of Deep Umbral critters. The Horizon also makes a wonderful neighborhood for Umbral Chantries, and everyone who's anyone wants to move in. You see, here in the Horizon, you can build your very own dream Chantry. Want a world where water routinely flows uphill? Or perhaps a world in which the pink rays of the two suns shine down on yellow and purple polka-dotted grass? Tacky, I'll admit, but easy enough to do. A Horizon Realm is a custom-built reality, as opposed to the spontaneously created realities of other types of Realms. Most mages create Chantries that conform perfectly to their own world view and magickal (or Scientific) theories, making them wonderful places to study and experiment.

Establishing a Horizon Realm

Building such a Realm requires tremendous amounts of skill, patience, luck, power and Quintessence. Through a monumental effort, which may take days or even weeks, the creators tear a small "pocket" in reality, feed it Prime juice, seal it back up, then set the wheels of evolution turning inside the pocket. A tie or series of ties from various Nodes keeps the Quintessence flowing into the Realm while the construction team works inside the Realm, establishing its geography, resources, limitations, and overall appeal. In time, they usually shunt buildings, people and livestock into the Realm through portals built for that purpose, which are sealed after all the major "shipments" are through. A couple of portals are left open for travel (you wouldn't want to be sealed up in your own reality for all eternity would you? Talk about a Quiet attack!), and various protections are set up around the Nodes and portals. The whole process can take anywhere from a few days (for a really tiny Realm) to years or even decades (like Horizon Chantry itself, or Autocthonía).

Whoever sets up a Horizon Realm make the rules; reality — and the means to change it — are established during the "blueprint" stage. Once everything's in motion, everyone has to abide by the laws of the Realm, by the "set" the creators give the local reality. If a bunch of nature-mysticks, like Verbena, establish a Horizon Realm, you can bet the Virtual Adept's computer won't behave the way it should there. Other forms of magick, Science, technomagick or whatever (hey, they're all the same thing, after all!) will work, but those forms which don't fit the local reality set will be vulgar, as they say, and will be harder and riskier to perform.

These creators must also attach their Horizon Realms to Nodes and Channies on Earth to provide them with power. Horizon Realms whose access to Quintessence gets cut seal up within themselves and literally cease to exist. This happened to a lot of Channies and Technocracy

Constructs in Russia about two years ago, and lots of people died in a pretty hideous way. Well, nobody's quite sure whether it was hideous or not, but I can think of better ways to go, personally.

Entering and Exiting

Generally, you can only enter a Horizon Realm through a portal (often on Earth), which is nearly always well-guarded. They have to be, you know, because each one of these portals is like a gaping wound in the skin of the Horizon, beckoning a noxious Nephandi or mutilating Marauder to come and feast on the exposed Near Umbra. To say nothing of letting some stranger in to mess with your little world. Horizon Realms with direct access to the Horizon itself are even rarer and better guarded.

Portals form wormholes in space — shortcuts that allow you to cross an enormous distance in very little time. Entering a portal can be as simple or as complicated as the builders want it to be. I've been to tiny labs that were connected to doorways on Earth; step through, and there you are! The hidden entrances to Horizon Chantry itself contain so many locks, correspondences, codes, guardians and traps that Houdini himself couldn't get in or out.

Most Realms have powerful wards, sentinels, or both; lots of them have access codes, rituals, tests, ordeals, lunar cycles or other conditions which must be met before a visitor can step through on either side. Literally anything you can imagine — and lots of things few of you *could* imagine — regulate the openings and closings of Horizon portals. After all, she who owns the keys owns the castle!

That concluded, there's little for me to do but turn you over to our panel of experts. They will be describing some of the most prominent Horizon Realms, including Victoria Station (one of my favorites — no bias there!) So, pull out your Ether Goggles and your glow-stick, and read on!

Autocthonía



*By degrees — it is happening year by year,
appliance by appliance — we are wiring our-
selves to a gigantic hive.*

— Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies*
This place is incredible.

Autocthonía is a futuristic "arcology," as envisioned by contemporary architect Paolo Soleri: essentially, a self-sufficient, city-sized community encompassed entirely within a single structure. In this case, that structure is a space station 10 miles in diameter. To hundreds of Kamrads, Technomancers, cyborgs and artificial constructs, it serves as both place of employment and residence. The rest of Iteration X considers it a logical replacement for heaven.

This massive Realm/Construct exists in the Deep Universe, orbiting the sun directly opposite Earth. It appears to be a polished chrome sphere, but is, in fact, a polyhedron. At most recent count, it has 4,294,967,200 sides. Set into the surface are solar panels measured by the acre, delicate 100-foot-tall antennae, and sealed ports concealing satellite-probes, shuttles and weapon emplacements. Alien entities known as Geomids swarm about their native Realm.

Rarely has anyone outside the cyborg Convention or the Void Engineers' Autocthonía Research Corps seen this place. Few mages can overcome the many problems of Deep Universal travel. Fewer still can avoid being calcified by aggressive Attack Geomids. Furthermore, Iterators and we Void Engineers carefully restrict space exploration, as you know.

The interior decor is both High Industrial and vaguely organic, a metallic hive of echoing halls, slidewalks, transways, access tunnels and ducts, sphinctering or iris-ing hatches, cavernous chambers and Spartan cells. The steel bulkheads are reinforced with riblike beams, and occasionally pockmarked by corrosives. Every surface throbs with power. Between ceilings and walls run conduits and transparent pipes that carry unknown fluids in steady pulses. On regularly spaced monitors, updates and orders scroll constantly; interfaces are everywhere. Illumination is provided by shafts of amber light. The air smells vaguely of cut-steel and oil, rubber and heated circuitry, and the temperature remains at a consistent 37° C.

- Forbidden Planet

Among Traditionalists, the name "Autocthonía" engenders the same mix of mystery and dread as Hades or Hyperborea or any other mythical Realm. Hermetic mages refuse to speak that name, as if afraid to invoke the wrath of some demon. When they must, they refer to it as "the Realm of Binding."

Though imaginative tales abound, no Council mage has seen Autocthonía, or even knows its location. Even we Ethermages—who were associated with the Technocracy to some degree since our founding—can only hypothesize about its existence. This we rarely do, however; any Machine Realm of Iteration X must be lifeless and unimaginative, contrary to the philosophy of True Paradigm Science.

The cither Techno-Tradition, the Virtual Adepts, used to have a cocky nickname for Autocthonía: "Graybar Land." It refers to the mindless limbo created when your computer slowly processes gigabytes of data and you're stuck watching a gray progress bar creep across the screen. Four months ago, that most elite Virtual Master, RAMses, claimed to have discovered a Restricted Sector linked to this "Graybar Land" and hacked himself an "ultra-Elite" access code. Last week, I checked on him at the hospital—still no improvement, of course, but it's hard to simply accept the neurologist's report. Naturally, the Graybar joke is now pretty lame.

In any case, Autocthonía is apparently all too real. The following text file was intercepted in the Digital Web. After three years of cracking the encryption, we've learned that it's a report—a "pilgrim's narrative" of sorts—from a Void Engineer known as Quantum to his superiors at DSEATC (Dimensional Science Evaluation, Administration and Training Committee).

I know this Quantum well; he has quite a rep among Cybernauts. An impressive number of sectors bear his formatting imprint. On at least one occasion, he infiltrated the Crystal Palace—the Virtual Adepts' sanctum. On a personal level, the bastard has dumped my icon more than a few times. Now, apparently, he's been assigned to Autocthonía. From his zealous attitude, I think his tour of duty has lasted far too long.



Autocthonía runs by strict schedules. One doesn't dare be late. The halls are alternately vacant, or packed with dense but orderly crowds going about their assignments.

The above description is pretty typical of the outer layers. As one moves closer to the core, however, the decor gradually changes. Rooms and halls become more spacious and less cluttered: more and more interfaces are cybernetic. Coloration shifts to antiseptic white, or polished chrome. Lighting brightens to almost-blinding intensity. Warning signs—RESTRICTED: COMPTROLERS ONLY BEYOND THIS POINT -- become unavoidable; security tightens. Only the most efficient and loyal Iterators reach the central core, site of The Computer. I have been told that I am the only Void Engineer to receive this honor.

This next feature is not immediately obvious, but integral nevertheless. As befits a cybernetic Utopia, Autocthonía provides an almost-ideal interface between human and environment, human and tools. From the size and shape of rooms, to the level and angle of monitors; from the form and positioning of controls, to "conform" (comfort-forming) chairs and advanced interfaces—everything has been designed upon the principals of ergonomics (convenience) and anthropometrics (proportional to the human body). Existence here is very comfortable, almost effortless. I now understand the appeal that a cybernetic existence holds for Iteration X, and I look forward to being assimilated by The Big Machine.

Background

Before Autocthonía, there was only as single Pattern Realm drifting through the Galaxy, one of those Deep Universe enigmas the reality deviants call *Shenti*. According to Iteration X databases, this Realm formed 65,845 years ago as a one-sided shape. After a year, it split into a two-dimensional surface; after two years, into a tetrahedron; after four years, into a 16-sided shape; and so on right up to its current form. The Realm continues to evolve, expanding indefinitely, striving ever toward that most perfect of shapes: the sphere. This account fits certain facts: that the Realm is a platonic solid; and that 30 years ago, every one of the 65,536 facets divided into 65,536 more sides.

However, any mathematician could point out a serious flaw in this reasoning (aside from the problem of initial creation from nothing): one times one equals one, not two. So how did this Pattern Realm ever evolve beyond a one-sided form? This question has become a constant source of consternation among Statisticians. The task-force formed in 1941 continues to hammer out a mathematical formula which would solve the problem without contradicting the current paradigm. By comparison, the conceptual difficulty of a one-sided form was solved rather easily by non-Euclidean geometry.

In any case, this Pattern Shenti existed long before Iteration X's foundation. During the reign of Sh'n Tsung (A.D. 1068-86) of the Sung Dynasty, Chinese Artificers noticed this celestial object. They invented a device—a disk inscribed with a diagram representing the Twelve Terrestrial Branches and Ten Celestial Trunks (indicating the cardinal and intermediate points), further verified by means of the Five Elements, Five Colors and Eight Trigrams—that enabled them to chart its position at any time of year. Aided by of such a device, the first Artificer shifted through space to this Shenti of Pattern.

The Artificers found this Realm ideal to their needs. Their technology-based philosophy and the local Pattern emissions [**Editor's Note:** Quintessence. — *Alexis*] resonated perfectly. In fact, by studying the regular formation of Forces, Life and Matter, they first formulated the fields of cybernetics and biomechanics. Soon, the Artificers established a Construct here, shaped from the Realm itself. They named it Qian-Chengshi ("Thousand City"), after the number of Artificers, mundane thinkers, soldiers, and so forth assigned to study, survey and fortify and the place. This Construct gradually expanded to completely encompass the Realm.

In 1766, Qian-Chengshi was lost to the Artificers during a war with Chinese wizards called Wu Lung. These so-called "Dragon Wizards" somehow bumped the entire Realm out of orbit, rendering centuries of careful calculation useless. Without exact coordinates, it was impossible for Artificers to reach the place. This magical assault was a crude sledge-hammer blow, but impressive and effective nonetheless. Deprived of their most prized possession, the Artificers fell demoralized. For the first and last time in their long history, the Convention admitted defeat, and soon lost much of their influence over mainland China.

Qian-Chengshi remained lost for almost 300 years. In 1931, however, a Void Engineer named Terrell Kree rediscovered the Realm, now orbiting the sun, after a navigation error led his ship astray. Despite centuries of isolation, the Construct still operated efficiently. Apparently, inhabitants of the Thousand City had resolved that their work could continue without contact with Earth, and that Earth-bound Artificers would find their way back at an appropriate point in the Timetable. Kree called the "lost tribe" of Technomancers "Autocthonians," because he initially theorized that they had sprung from the Realm itself. The name "Autocthonía" eventually stuck. In any case, Artificers—now known as Iteration X—used Kree's navigation charts to reestablish links with Qian-Chengshi. Their first action was to transplant their valuable Command Computer into the core of Autocthonía, probably as a means of reunifying the Terrans and Autocthonians under one logical authority. Their second action was to reward Terrell Kree; henceforth, we Void Engineers were permitted to maintain a staff of observers on Autocthonía. Thus my presence here.

Shielded from prying eyes by the Sun and employing aggressive defensive measures, Autocthonias has maintained its secrecy up to this day. It has also grown immensely powerful. One mistake that many Traditionalists make is to consider our Technocracy static and stagnant. In fact, this Construct epitomises our ideal of carefully planned, controlled expansion. Autocthonias represents a product that has gone through hundreds of design iterations and is approaching perfection [**Editor's Note:** the Summer phase, in Hermetic terminology. — *Alexis*],

Places of Interest

Autocthonias is a vast Realm. The following describes only the most visible or significant locations.

Reception

Autocthonias is not accessible directly from Earth. Instead, a supplicant must use the Digital Imaging Chamber (a type of transporter) of a major Iteration X Construct. Even then, one must know the correct coordinates and/or have a high security clearance. Triple-redundancy security programs, including retina scans, handprint analysis and voice recognition procedures, protect the Construct from unauthorized visitors, and HIT Marks and cybernetically-enhanced personnel wait close by each Chamber to intercept intruders. Thus, the Realm remains rather secure.

Upon arriving in Autocthonias, a visitor steps out of the destination Digital Imaging Chamber and finds herself in a reception/security room (one of 10 in the Realm). Nine other DICs open onto this 40-foot-deep, semicircular chamber. Two sliding doors—one entrance, one exit—facilitate traffic. Projecting from the flat wall is a biomechanical device with human-looking features. This Interface combines the functions of security officer, information kiosk, and energy dispenser. If need be, it also provides a formidable line of defense.

The Complex

As a wise Comptroller once said "Even machines rest." Just as mundanes sleep most soundly after intense exertion, cyborgs recharge best after draining most of the power from their capacitors. Consider it a form of ritual purging. Part fitness center, part military training academy and more, the Complex provides a range of sanctioned recreation activities. Weight machines, sparring rings (with robotic opponents available), tracks, obstacle courses, firing ranges, vast arenas devoted to organized wargames, and even Holographic Immersion terminals are all available. Though this is the most popular way to spend down-time, some Iterators prefer to read (certain approved texts, ofcourse) or write, fiddle about in workshops, render using paint programs, participate in Net-games, or listen to digital recordings.

Sleep Pods

While Autocthonias still has standard dormitories, many Iterators prefer the more efficient sleep pods, artificial wombs recessed into the walls. To enter, one need only press against the membrane covering the opening; if your genetic pattern matches, this membrane becomes permeable. Inside, the resident is enfolded by fleshy cushions, lulled to sleep by alpha-wave inhibitors, and rejuvenated by intravenous feeds and power-cords.

Research Departments

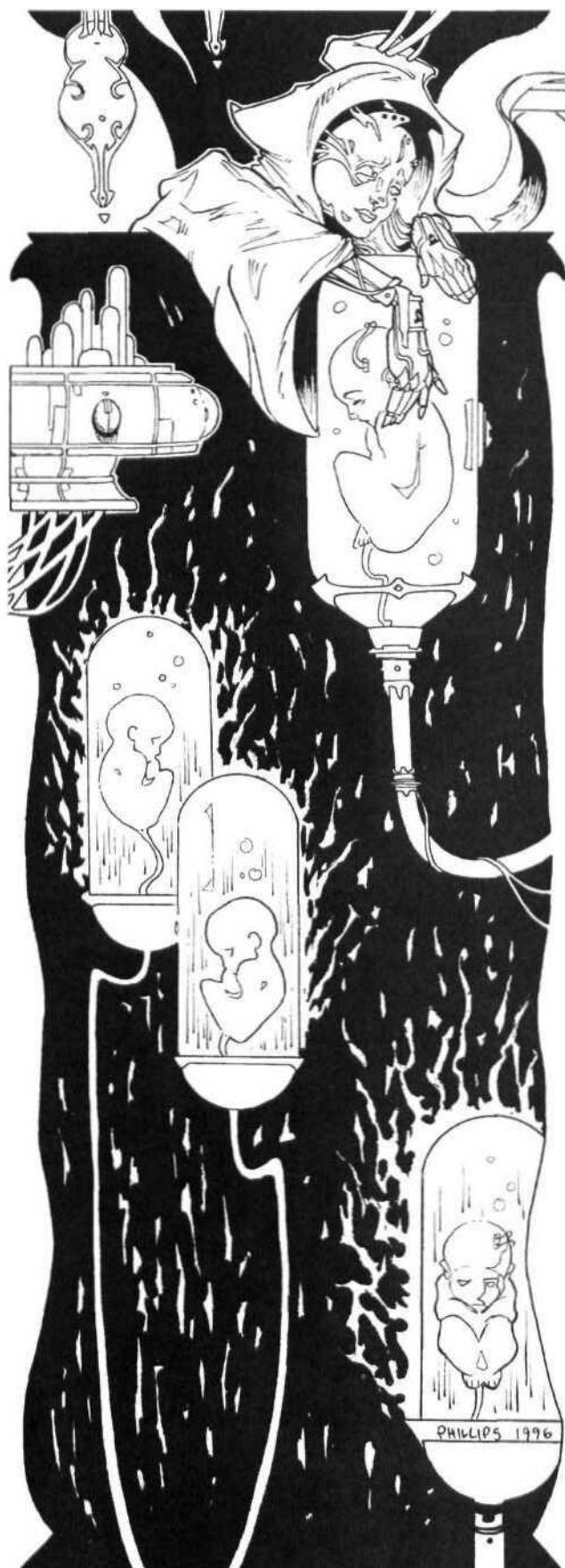
Autocthonias has scores of research departments. BioMechanics maintain medical bays where experimental implant-surgery is performed. Time-Motion Managers favor Auto-CAD cubicles and machine shops. These perfectionists run through thousands of design iterations before their concepts for new HIT Marks, Digital Implants, and other technologies are even put into production. Then the real testing begins. In Restricted Sectors of the Net, Statisticians conduct computer simulations to determine how a new theory or technology might affect the current paradigm.

One notable research department is headed by 1011111111. Their current project (designation: Pulse) attempts to create a new generation of Cybernauts raised entirely in the Net. This could easily be a Virtual Adept enterprise, if not for the 10 vivisected, hard-wired infants suspended in nutrient tanks. The Virtual Adepts would never have vision enough to implement such a bold and innovative strategy.

Control Room and Central Core

Autocthonias's control room is a multistoried ring surrounding the central core. The interior wall is lined with windows overlooking the core, to facilitate communication between Comptrollers and The Computer. The exterior wall is a checkerboard of monitors that flash information at dizzying rates. This control room's strangest feature is its apparent lack of control panels. Black, alien-looking chairs with bone-like frames and fleshy padding provide the only furniture. These chairs are, in fact, anthropometric control panels, equipped with a spinal tap that permits an instant communication relay between occupant and computer. At a thought, the chairs swivel to facilitate viewing of any screen or window.

The Central Core is a massive shaft lined with computer banks and power grids. These walls house The Computer—the artificial intelligence behind Iteration X. Autocthonias's entire structure provides an extension of The Computer, its CPU and main I/O ports. From what others have told me, the voice and image of The Computer materialize as a buzzing, swirling hologram, one which occasionally visits loyal servants in other Constructs. I have never communicated directly with The



Computer myself — this singular honor is reserved for Comptrollers and Iteration X's most senior Programmers. However, I have been told that It resembles a pillar of static, with a voice like bass thunder and a gaze of magnesium fire. In Its presence, the hot dry air smells of charged ions and burning copper wire. Those who prove unworthy to look upon It — by harboring fear or ambition — are struck down by the shocking truth of their own insignificance.

Power Core

Adjacent to either pole of the Central Core lie the primary and secondary power generators. The primary generator taps into a micron star [**Editor's Note:** Perhaps a Node of raw Quintessence. — *Alexis*] which fuels the Pattern Realm. This raw plasma generates a virtually unlimited supply of particles, which then generate energy, food and water and materials. Thus, Autocthonía remains completely self-sufficient, free from the despicable machinations of the MECHA Construct. The secondary generator is a backup, kept idle in case the primary generator fails. Linked to a minor anti-matter pocket [**Editor's Note:** An Entropic Node, perhaps? — *Alexis*] on Earth, this generator may recycle various Patterns if necessary until a new power source could be acquired. Because Iterators are wary of Entropy, the secondary generator is maintained at minimal power.

The robed engineers who monitor the power generators go about their duties faithfully and in somber silence. I have often seen them gazing into the flickering reactions deep within the core, as if mesmerized by the sight of some greater entity.

The Realm's mundane residents believe that Autocthonía is powered by a solar-assisted fission generator. The photovoltaic shingles on Autocthonía's surface operate at 50% efficiency, meaning that half the sunlight striking them is converted into energy. (By comparison, the current Earth record is 29.5%.)

Ecology

This Construct has a mixed reputation as a place whence visitors never return. This truth has two derivations; first, any intruder close enough to see Autocthonía is also within range of the Construct's security/defense system. Few trespassers are ever seen again. The second truth behind disappearances is more intriguing: Iterators assigned to Autocthonía eventually become integrated into the Realm -- body, mind and "soul." Iterators consider this the highest honor. The Interfaces are perfect examples of such integration, Autocthonía itself is, in a sense, alive.

This makes Autocthonía a powerful symbol for the Technocracy. Though humans are mortal, the collective is Immortal. By contributing to the superorganism — in this case Autocthonía — a piece of every Technocrat can live

forever. This helps explain the hundreds of Kamrads and scores of Technomancers who stay content to live entirely within Autocthonía, never returning to Earth if they can help it. Once assigned to the Construct, it is a horrible disgrace for a Technocrat to be removed. I have known two Iterators myself who dispatched themselves rather than be relocated back to Earth.

A comfortable estimate of Autocthonía's inhabitants might be: 100 Iterators and Enlightened cyborgs, 10 Void Engineers, 500 Kamrads, 200 HIT Marks, 300 un-Enlightened cyborgs, and 50 Cyber-tooth Tigers. This does not include the robots, automated vehicles, Advanced RotorCraft, and so forth. (And yes: a number of places — transways, balcony-lined courtyards, maintenance shafts, etc. — are spacious enough to permit vehicle traffic.)

Autocthonía is defended on all fronts. Anyone who approaches from the Deep Universe must evade the calci-fying touch of swarming Attack Geomids and two Newton shuttlecraft equipped with extra armament for patrols. Those who attempt entry via the Digital Web must bypass security subroutines and the 10 Pulse units. Even if an intruder were to reach the interior, he would never get past the patrols of Guardian Constructs. Autocthonía employs the latest in HIT Mark technology, the NT-1 (NanoTech Assemblage) series. When necessary, these form from the Realm itself and deploy by morphing through walls, floors, or other convenient surfaces. Thus, they have an excellent response time. When no longer needed, they are reabsorbed.

What a glorious world!

Balador Pleasuredome



One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other.

— Jane Austen

The road to wisdom, said Blake, comes from excess. We Ecstatics call that road *ananda*, the bliss which stops time and expands the consciousness beyond mere mortal sight. On Earth, *ananda*'s path is shot through with potholes — laws against pleasure, necessities of survival, and other dangers offered by one's own inner demons. In the controlled environment of Balador, devoted Ecstatics can experience *ananda* without outside distractions. Everything a person could want — aside from wealth — is there for the asking.

Balador is not a free ride; only Cultists of Ecstasy and their chosen guests are allowed, and it helps if some regular gets you your first pass in. All pleasures are consensual, or they don't occur. No exceptions. Each visitor must perform a service for the Chantry for every three days of their stay. Debtors and troublemakers are escorted to the Crystal Doorway, ejected and forbidden to return. All personal possessions, including clothes, are left to an attendant at the Doorway. No "insurance" exists; as ye harm none, do what you will. If you get hurt, it's your problem.

Although it's fairly notorious, few mages outside the Cult have actually been to Balador. Like most rumors, the stories of this "den of iniquity" have grown larger than the Horizon Realm itself. Those who see it only for its excesses miss the point, anyway. It's still an impressive sight, and not a place for the easily-shocked. The bodies sprawled across the Great Hall of Aphrodite, the Chantry's main entrance, are enough to rattle the composure of more refined folk. The residents of Balador are nothing if not active.

Background

It's said that Akrites Salonikas, one of our Tradition's founders, laid the cornerstones of Balador Pleasuredome. Other rumors claim that it began as the Xanadu built by Kublai Khan's demands. Records are scant, and back-traces reveal a bewildering array of impressions. The Greco-Arabian architecture hints at a joint venture in the early pan of the first Common Era ~~millennium~~. Who knows where the Realm really came from? Whatever its origins, Balador has become the premiere Chantry of the Ecstatics, a world of pleasures, adventures and stimulations galore. Its history spans centuries and its design melds all the best elements of past ages into a chaotic yet pleasurable whole.

The earliest accounts of Balador come from the records of Horizon, where diplomats from other groups were brought to "...a Magickall Land where divers Seers cavorted with each other in Great Chambers like unto the Halls of Sodom, but with less purpose and without Divine punishments." As always, our forebears made a lasting impression on their peers. No official foundation dates exist within the Pleasuredome itself; the earliest financial transactions date from the late 1700s, and we know the Realm is far older than that. Occasionally,

• Wolfgang Blacksin

It's been said I love to hear myself talk. That's probably true. But at the risk of breaking my sterling reputation, I'm afraid I'm going to be brief. For one thing, the place isn't for everybody's R&R. Only known Ecstatics and their special guests are allowed in. Secondly, if I went on at length about Balador's secrets, everyone on Earth would want to visit. And trust me, this Realm is not for casual consumption. Sorry folks!

-Wolfgang Blacksin

people step out of the time flow speaking archaic dialects, ignorant of the last few hundred years of Earthly affairs. Although some curious folks (myself included) have peered through the past to find out what set the whole place in motion, the psychic residue from thousands of visitors brought to unendurable passions clouds the view. Perhaps that's for the best.

The Earliest known Master of the Pleasures was Del Ryhann, a Welsh sorcerer who had helped to free imprisoned "witches" throughout Europe. During the tumultuous centuries between the foundation of the Council and the modern revolution, Balador became a refuge for lots of folks fleeing witch-hunts and the so-called "Age of Exploration." Faeries and mysticks from other Traditions came here and never left. Or never wanted to, anyway. Unfortunately, not everyone grasped the spirit of the Pleasuredome; some visitors felt compelled to violate one of the only rules within the Realm — harm no one who doesn't want to be harmed — and brought the violence they had fled along with them. Finally, things got nasty; a showdown between Del Ryhann and a gang of rapists turned into a battle which left scores of people dead. For a while, the portals were closed and the protocols revised; visitors soon had to pay their way in service, and a list of infractions was drafted. Even heaven has its limits, and the Pleasuredome had established a few.

Del Ryhann died — happily — in a bed of concubines in 1787; his successor, Lady Loralie Estelle Domingo, seemed uncertain of her post, and soon passed it to James Togarde of Rackham, Virginia. He eventually offered the office to the current supervisor, Marianna. Her tenure has been so successful that she's acquired the title "Marianna of Balador" from Ecstatics and outsiders alike. Under her gentle yet firm administration, Balador has become what its founders desired: a center of enlightenment through intense stimulation,

Places of Interest

I'm not sure there's a place in Balador that's not interesting; all the same, I'll limit myself to the most notable places.

On the whole, the Realm resembles a massive copy of the Hagia Sophia, a cathedral in Istanbul, Turkey. All kinds of scents and sights await the curious visitor, and even longtime residents find each day in Balador a delight of new sensations. The folks who maintain the Realm make a contest of creating new ways to excite one another's senses. When the visions subside, they gather into groups and discuss what they've experienced, then try to share those visions with the others. This, in turn, creates other stimulations, and so on, and so on, and so on....

The Great Hall of Aphrodite

Most earthly portals lead to the Crystal Doorway, an alcove in a Great Hall dedicated to that most famous Goddess of Love; the Hall's marble chamber vaults nearly 100 feet, like the apse of a grand cathedral, and has a 1000-foot diameter. As its name suggests, the Great Hall evokes a Greek temple with some modern touches. Six huge gates lead to subrealms, while a host of smaller doors lead to private apartments, storage rooms, kitchens and other, smaller Halls. Magickal candles light the interior with a soft glow; a central fountain runs 20 feet deep, and its water remains cool and pure. Stairs lead up to other chambers, and a network of trapezes, swings and wires tempt naked aerialists to try their skills. A host of couches, low tables and benches make the Hall a comfortable place for liaisons, massages and simple talk. Despite the Hall's expanse, all sounds muffle at about two yatts' distance, for privacy's sake.

The City of Altua

Outside the Great Hall lies Altua. More like a large town than a city, Altua mingles Arabian and Greek architecture in a fairy-tale setting. This settlement houses the acolytes and mages who live in the Realm full-time, and features elaborate homes, massive gardens and the all-encompassing sea which marks Altua's borders. For such a large Realm, Balador's population is small; no more than 300 people are allowed in at one time, including guests.

The Subrealms

Luxury grows boring eventually. To test their skills and endurance, many Ecstatics pit themselves against the harsher environments of the six subrealms connected to the Hall of Aphrodite. Survival depends on your skills, wits and magicks; no camping gear is available. It's you against the wilderness. May the best side win.

Balador's six subrealms feature a tropical island, a desert with high mesas, a jungle, a deep forest, mountains and a zero-G environment for adventurous visitors. Each subrealm contains complete ecosystems, carefully balanced to avoid strange diseases or population explosions. These places are fun to visit, but not always safe.... Perhaps that's the reason the most profound visions seem to come from such expeditions. Pushing yourself to the limits and beyond is what ananda is all about.

The Nine Epicurean Halls

In addition to innumerable private chambers, kitchens, playrooms and storage facilities, the Chantry itself boasts nine large halls:

- **The Nightclub**, which features different sounds on different nights. The most common include Goth Night, Midnight Rave, Nostalgia Night, Tribal Beat, Hip Hop House, Industrial Workshop, Sodom-Nite (all gay), and Disco Infernal. Some deejays mix all of the above. The club is large, with Matter-trained bartenders who can literally mix any drink imaginable. The light shows have to be seen to be believed.

- **Lotus Hall**, where any kind of drug is yours to explore, free of charge. The decor reminds me of the height of the Age of Aquarius. Off to one side, a sensory deprivation chamber awaits the curious.

- **Torture Garden**, a haven for those who favor SM, BD, fetish shows and pain exhibitions. With the healers available at Balador, any kink can be explored with little risk.

- **The Spartan Gym**, where physical workouts can be enjoyed Greek style. The gym is co-ed, but has private-hours for those who wish to exercise alone. Large steam baths and several deep cold pools lead off from the gym; these too are co-ed, and kept germ-free through constant magick.

- **The Theatre Dionysos**, which features plays, films and shows by those who want more passive entertainment, or for Cultists who wish to perform.

- **The Arena**, where bands play. More often than not, these guests are brought from Earth during induced fugue states in which they remember little except performing for a small but enthusiastic audience.

- **The Circle of Pain**, an elaborate certamen arena where Cultists with a grudge can work it off without hurting anyone permanently.

- **Stim City**, where techno-Ecstatics wire themselves and their friends into weird stimulations, VR thrillrides, and "live" MUSHES, MUDs, sex lines and video games through a back door to the Digital Web. Although casualties are rare, they do happen. Remember, Balador is a "use-at-your-risk" facility.

- **The Hall of Ishtar**, where the greatest orgies imaginable occur daily. Satyrs, Ecstatic musicians and even the occasional vampire weave seductive music beneath an endlessly changing tapestry of flesh. Ambient magicks heighten the sensual atmosphere, and free pregnancy and VD control spells are performed at the door.

The Eternity Pool

A dive in this purewater spring doesn't *really* last forever, but it certainly seems to. Beneath the surface, a combination of permanent Life and Time magicks take swimmers out of time while allowing them to breathe indefinitely. So long as you remain below the waters, no time passes above them.

The Eternity Pool has been carved from solid rock beneath a 100-foot waterfall on the outskirts of Altua. Refreshingly chill, the Pool goes down nearly 50 feet before sloping upward. Anyone who wants to swim there is free to. Near the bottom, the currents have shaped a series of caves and grottos; the fish that dwell there come in an assortment of surprising colors. Some Ecstatics anchor themselves halfway down and meditate in suspended space; others use the Pool for liaisons impossible under normal conditions. Occasionally, a guest who overstays his welcome tries to prolong his visit by remaining underwater; when this happens, he's left to his own devices. After all, he'll get bored — waterlogged — sooner or later.

Ecology

Balador is designed to keep itself running with as little effort as possible. While outsiders insist that the acolytes are kept there in bondage (a rumor which began two ill-fated crusades against the Realm over the last century), everyone is there of their own free will.

Resident acolytes are chosen for their beauty and skill in a variety of arts. Their children often inherit those blessings — good genes certainly seem to carry over to children born in Balador. Food and other goods are usually grown in large gardens, harvested regularly, and traded for favors in a small market in the city square. No currency debases the Pleasuredome — everything is done through a system of barter. Thus, the Realm suffers no crime or poverty. Occasional harsh storms buffet the city (stirred, no doubt, by the Resonance from Balador's endless passions), but the buildings are constructed so solidly that little actual damage is done.

Two strict laws apply: All liaisons must be consensual, and no children are to be involved. Murder is frowned upon, but it's been known to happen. Marianna's punishments for these infractions are harsh: empathic links from abuser to abused, with some Time thrown in to prolong the experience, followed by sensory deprivation, then banishment. Few offenders repeat their mistakes, here or anywhere.

The residents of Balador are scrupulously honest; if they're caught stealing or lying, they're banished from the Realm for life. Marianna heads the Arbitration Council, a loose group which decides matters of concern, when necessary. All Chantry consors are renowned for their talents and good looks; their ranks contain a handful of faeries and shapechangers as well as a couple of mythic beasts. The Realms' mages — the North Sky, Celestial Peacock and Midnight Leopard cabals — take turns with security, service and maintenance. One tour per week, with one week off for pleasure. It's a small price to pay.

Darkside Moonbase and the Copernicus Research Center



His said "Science Is Truth Found Out." Mine said "The Truth Can Be Made Up if You Know How."

— Jane Wagner, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*

Well. Well. Well, well, well. You want me to tell you about these places you've heard of, "the Cop" and "Darkside Moon Base." No small feat, that. You want me to place my existence in jeopardy, to risk life and limbs, such as they are, to expostulate upon the two most highly classified enigmas in all the Technocracy? You expect me to chance discovery by the soulless Technocrats who have sought me unsuccessful-

• Bio of a Space Tirade

Dr. Catherine Nichols is, in her own words, "a former vassal of the Technocratic Ideal, bound eternally from achieving knowledge of the mysteries of the Universe by bureaucratic red tape and administrative brouhahas" — that is, an ex-Void Engineer. She was born in 1918, during the height of the influenza epidemic, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The youngest of several children, most of whom never completed high school, much less college, she received an opportunity to attend Oxford University through the generosity of a mysterious mentor. She graduated with a bachelor of science degree in physics in 1938, and was pursuing her graduate studies when the world exploded into war.

She has a Ph.D. in physics from Oxford University, as well as an additional Ph.D. in astrophysics from the University of California at Berkeley (achieved much later in life). She participated in much of the Void Engineers' progress during the great steps in space exploration of the 1960s and 1970s.

Dr. Nichols became disenchanted with the Technocracy in general when the Challenger exploded in 1985, and within the year she planned her escape from the Engineers. The plan fell apart somewhat, resulting in what she describes as "not so much a dogfight as a donnybrook in powered armor." She did manage to elude pursuit, despite severe injuries.

She lives alone now, despite being severely disabled, and kindly agreed to assist this project with a description of the two Void Engineer bases. However, to ensure her own safety, she did change her place of habitation to an unknown site after speaking to us.

fully during the years since my escape? You presume that I, a woman who has endured emotional mutilation and physical trauma beyond your wildest imaginings, am willing to endanger what little peace I have managed to bring to my pathetic life?

Where shall I begin?

What and Where is the Darkside Moon Base?

What, pray tell, is not connected to the Moon, that almighty force with the gentle manifestations? What laboratory walls can keep her in or out? Who can study our Grandmother? Who can measure her, she who was the first measurement, never quite fitting? Who can study her effect on humans when everyone who tries to study her is already under her influence?

— Zsuzsanna E. Budapest, *Grandmother Moon*

The creatively named original base of the Void Engineers is, as is obvious to all but the densest thinkers, on the dark side of the Moon, Set roughly in the center of this unobservable side of Earth's nearest celestial neighbor, in a crater named Daedalus, Darkside is a hulking gray dome pushing through the selenic crust rather like a wart working its way out of someone's finger.

Under the lump of concrete, steel and ceramic is the carefully recycled stale atmosphere of the Void Engineers' oldest extant base. The air tastes of heavy metals and plastics and petroleum products, and the water smells of conditioning salts and vast iron filtering tanks. Over it all is the feel of clammy sweat, a vague, ever-present blue haze, and the heavy, pressing vibration of vast, seemingly ancient engines.

Moving around the blank corridors, one or two at a time, are slightly tarnished silver robots, humanoid in build and proportion, their eyes glowing with blind purpose or occasionally malignant resignation. You never see a person. Or rarely. An insidious and pervasive lethargy drains everyone who arrives. Anyone stationed there for any length of time simply lets the robots handle things.

For years, problems persisted with young Void Engineers stationed there for even the briefest tours. The suicide rate skyrocketed.

The living quarters are uniformly ascetic, with board-like cots that slide out from the walls, and kitchen facilities that turn out the finest in cardboard cuisine. Everyone is expected to recycle everything, down to the smallest drop-let of sweat if you can help it. Times are difficult at Darkside... but then, they always have been.



Beneath the living quarters lie vast monitoring computer systems that don't seem to have been updated since humans first walked upright, chugging along day and night. Independent monitor-links receive messages from beyond the Horizon and detect anomalies entering Earth's vicinity. And beneath *them* lie the great life-support engines, thrumming and pounding through their daily chores, resounding through the entire base and everyone in it a mighty, oppressive orchestral movement that never ends.

Or is that simply a mighty oppressive orchestral movement? I always think of Wagner played too slowly and slightly out of tune when I recall my time at Darkside.

According to what I understood at the time, a number of the local craters have been turned into huge radio telescope-like receivers, ready to field any transmissions from inside or outside the Solar System. I know that the craters Keeler, Aitken, Gagarin, Pavlov and Van de Graaff are receivers because these were in my monitoring quadrant. I know nothing about the others.

Believe me, Darkside earns its name. It is certainly the darkest side of the Void Engineers as far as sheer atmosphere is concerned.

A Dark, Dark History

Way back when the Convention really got started on their Technocratic "duty" — guarding the Earth from weird alien invasions — many Void Engineers moved off Earth. This was probably sometime in the early 1870s. It was a nice stunt to get the Technocracy's freaks out of the hair of the Victorian

New World Order, I think, and give them some purpose so they didn't end up like the cranky Sons of Ethanol... er, Ether. An idle mind is the devil's playground, so to speak.

Anyway, the Engineers needed *somewhere* to go; after all, they couldn't just jet around in orbit for eternity. So they picked a sumptuous spot on the far side of the Moon and settled down to business.

I've been convinced for years that many of the Void Engineers realized for the first time at that point that the New World Order was slowly closing its iron fist around the entire Technocracy. Perhaps a number of these hapless explorers fell into an abiding depression at the thought. It's the only way I can explain Darkside's design.

History maintains that Darkside was built with the most futuristic view possible at the time in mind. Someone who hasn't been there cannot imagine how bleak this view of the future could be. Perhaps if you go home and watch Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, you might get some inkling of it. Marvelous movie. Too bad the happy ending hasn't happened yet.

In the era when Darkside was built, it was easy to take people for use as slaves... er, technicians. People noticed disappearances, but it never reached the enormous media proportions such things achieve today. For a long, long time, the halls of Darkside were peopled with barely-animated drones who did monitoring work for the Void Engineers, themselves far too busy looking outward and upward from their dreary existence to do menial tasks. The

tiny barracks were packed in conditions barely better than those in the future Nazi concentration camps. Perhaps that's where the Nazis got the idea.

Now, *that's* a frightening thought.

Originally, Darkside was a pair of connected twin bases, each set in a separate crater. The idea, I suppose, was to have separate research and living facilities. At least, that's what I understand the reasoning to have been.

At some point, so the story goes, a group of workers got some crazy idea to rebel against their infinitely patient and compassionate masters. They plunged one of the drills used to research the composition of the lunar crust as deep as it could go beneath the life-support engines, and then maxed out the power levels. The result was a localized moonquake that shattered the integrity of half the base, instantly killing everyone in the research quarters. Well, almost instantly.

I suppose that's what they get for establishing a base in a crater they happened to have named Icarus.

So they had to salvage what they could from Icarus and resettle everything into the Daedalus part of the base. They never bothered to repair or rebuild the other half. The disaster so reduced the monitor population that the Engineers feared their surveillance of the Moon and Deep Universe would suffer. They appealed to Iteration X, who built them the first batch of robots. Thanks a lot, guys. All of the robots look alike, absolutely identical. It's maddening, not knowing if the robot standing in front of you is the one you just ordered to do something, or if it's another one. Something in their programming makes them eliminate any identifying marks placed on them. They're simply maddening.

Even after the Cop went into use, the Committee kept Darkside open. One of the things the base is supposed to monitor is unusual activity on the surface of the Moon, especially activity that might threaten the Earth. I know of two different incidents, but have only vague details, so I won't bore you. Both have been commemorated, though, by someone with a flash of humor not entirely stagnated by Darkside. The craters nearest those incident sites are called Jules Verne and H.G. Wells.

These days, other than the occasional group of students coming through the base for training, Darkside is fairly lifeless. Only a dedicated core group of scientists who are entirely without personality continue the monitoring responsibilities.

Points of Interest

Despite its lifeless appearance, Darkside boasts a human population of roughly 200. Like I said, it's not the lack of people but the utter lethargy of the place that makes it seem so empty. No one there has much energy to speak of unless there's an emergency, and even then, they're pretty slow to respond. It's a wonder the base has survived as many attacks and crises as it has.

Me, I think everyone there has a death wish. A subtle one, perhaps, but present just the same.

Schopenhauer Square

The center of the main, populated levels of Darkside is a vast, open square, designed for the social gatherings that the Void Engineers occasionally forced their workers to endure. I expect that said gatherings were veritable block parties, particularly raucous around the stern, forbidding, rather ill-formed lead statues of the Void Engineers' founding fathers, setting out in their ashes and sackcloth on their leaky dinghies to scout the Technocracy's promised lands. Truly one of the wonders of technological artistry.

Honestly, though, Schopenhauer Square is one of the most outstanding features of Darkside. Why, I believe it even has a tree and an entire bed of flowers.

The Monument to Technological Aspiration to Utopia

Leaning in dark, soaring, metal lines over the Square, as if to topple over and crush those unfortunate enough to be gathered in the streets, looms the Monument to Technological Aspiration to Utopia. Despite the glaring, sterile array of mercury vapor lamps installed in the last half century or so, the color of this building continued to elude me for my time at Darkside, and so did the particular details and proportions.

I've only been inside once: The stern, unforgiving brow of Queen Victoria perched larger than life at the entrance was sufficient to deflect my curiosity. The main hall was stark gray-streaked marble, the windows bedecked with heavy red velvet tapestries. Dense carpets, of obscure Eastern origin, paved the floor in such a way as to thoroughly destroy the sound dynamics of the vast, angled ceiling and wide, polished walls. No sound traveled well at floor level, though; all noise drifted upward to be trapped in the upper reaches of the architecture. During my mundane duties cleaning the ornate wrought iron chandeliers, I tried, as had many decades of students, to somehow scour the sickly yellow stained-glass panels. There, barely keeping my balance on the support beams, I could hear these imprisoned sounds, every one of them distorted into a wail of despair.

I'm told that this meeting area is frequently used as a place to impress visiting members of other Conventions, particularly the New World Order. However, I've never heard of any visitors or administrators staying in any of the adjoining smaller rooms, or actually staying anywhere in the Base at all. I suppose it's an excellent ploy to encourage outsiders from staying and looking around.

The Monument is a vast, black-and-white, art deco caricature of a cathedral. Have you ever read *The Haunting of Hill House*? The lines of the Monument, like the lines and angles of Hill House, are just a little off, giving it a frightening, unwieldy look, as if it were about to crash down around you.

The Cybernetic Maintenance Facility

Well, of course, all those robots need to be recharged and repaired somewhere, you know. Originally, this was where the last dregs of the human technicians were relegated — to care for their own replacements. There was a tall room fitted with technological niches that the robots simply snapped into like Legos. Academy stories relate that these last humans just sort of disappeared into the Facility. Of course, the professors flatly denied that any such thing ever occurred. At any rate, the robots care for their own, now. I find it unlikely that any human has been in there for years. I also find it unlikely that any human knows the exact number of robots on Darkside anymore. It's so ungodly hard to tell them apart, much less count them.

Of course, you never know what the Facility looks like now. Anything could be happening behind those doors. And the robots look so... cognizant of their surroundings sometimes. It's really uncanny,

Darkside Icarus

The ruins of Darkside Icarus are dark, dusty and cold; the connecting tunnels between the two bases were blocked during the artificial moonquake that racked Icarus. I've heard that the bodies were never recovered, nor was any attempt made to do more than salvage the equipment. Have you ever seen a dead spaceship? When you walk in, there's no gravity, no sound, no motion. Just cold, dead equipment and pale, frozen faces, eyes wide with surprise. I can only imagine that Icarus is like that. In my imagination, though, the eerie part is that I expect no surprise on the faces. Just quiet, tired resignation to fate and disaster.

I've heard stories that commanders of student corps in the Marines often relegate their misfits and behavior problems to patrolling the ruins. Rumors among these patrollers (which are quickly and cleanly crushed) include hearing echoing giggles, moans and screams of agony, and seeing flickering white and blue lights. One report tells of a cadet who swore that a corpse reached out, grabbed hold of his environmental suit's faceplate, and shook him from side to side like a terrier before hurling him into some of the broken machinery and resuming its former deadness.

It strikes me as unlikely that any but the most unlucky ghost would be trapped on the Moon. Probably just the poor lad's imagination. I heard though that there were indelible fingerprints on his faceplate.

Cute story.

The Heinlein Student Facility

The Heinlein Facility was originally a central portion of the old School of Dimensional Science, but it's been relegated to training ground status since the creation of the Halley Academy in the Cop. It was renovated from being

dull, dim classrooms to being dull, dim dormitories — the original dormitories were converted to laboratories — as well as Universal Suit storage and repair cubicles. This is, after all, no longer where the students come to learn book knowledge, but where they come to learn how not to die in hostile environments. Considering just how hostile Darkside is, it seems like the perfect place to learn survival.

The building seems molded against the dome in order to have the maximum number of ports to the lunar surface. This is also logical in the event of a radiation containment breach, when you want plenty of useless bodies to block the path of destruction. In essence, this turns the entire building into an emergency bulkhead for that region of Darkside. The students are encouraged, after their initial training in the Universal Suits, to take a "shortcut" when going anywhere in the building. This shortcut consists of donning a suit, trekking across the barren Moon surface, and reentering the building in the desired location. The verbal encouragement by the teachers is punctuated by the ill-lit, labyrinthine corridors inside the Facility proper. I've heard tales of new students getting hopelessly lost and starving to death en route to the dining hall.

Buried in the center of the boxy brick building that houses the Facility is the Museum of the Explorets, a dismal chamber filled with dusty mementos of the early Deep-Universe pioneers. It contains ancient cathode-ray tubes once used for radar-type displays and visual transmissions, the enormous metal pipes with battery packs that were the original Smart Guns, and the eerie, inflated Buck Rogers reject spacesuits that dangle precariously from the ceiling. Everything is covered quite uniformly with a layer of dust that even the robots ignore. I'm told it's the place to go when a student or two wish some semblance of privacy.

The Convention made an effort to reduce the unfriendliness of the dormitories several years ago. Thus, the central lounge on every floor boasts a looming 100-gallon aquarium, populated with the most unusual and colorful salt water fish the ocean explorers could capture. The experiment was all but abandoned when the fish showed a remarkably irritating habit of losing their color and drifting somewhat lethargically around the tank before simply ceasing to move. There are a few hardy survivors, I'm told, mostly fish that no one can seem to identify, though they are large and lumpy, gray and rather malignant.

Construction and Launch Bay

Outside the dome lies a small scar on the moonscape, a tiny area scraped clear of rocks and rendered absolutely level by some monstrous machine or other. A network of interlinked cabins sits upon this flat zone, joined by pulsing life-support tubes. At any hour, you can see people in Universal Suits puttering about with tools and guns and assorted gizmos and gadgets. Periodically, one of the lower-lying buildings opens and spits forth a Void Engine or three.

The Void Engineers use these cabins for the construction and launching of satellites and vehicles, and for staging some orbital and Solar Space operations. Yes, this is where UFOs are born.

Laid underneath the packed surface is the wiring for the base's Dimensional Science Transferral Unit. The DSTU is the means for staging Solar Space missions.

Space Marine Facility

Rambo is alive and well and living on the Moon. When the Deep Universe was proving itself to be, shall we say, unpleasant, the Void Engineer high command created an elite corps of dunderheads to go out there and fight. For the good of all the Earth, of course. It wasn't difficult; give a man a gun and an excuse, and he'll go to great lengths to blow things away. Anytime, anyplace.

As the jumping-off point for Deep Universal travel, Darkside became the perfect place to let aspiring Flash Gordons kill themselves without putting too many other people in danger. If they survived their training period (I'd say about 75% of them do), they would be strapped into Universal craft and shipped off to ports of call in the Final Frontier. Very few of them ever see the Earth again, but hey, it was getting too crowded there anyway. And with the marines out of the gene pool, the planet is better off for their sacrifice.

These days, of course, it's not just men. My own, shall we say, state of health is ample indication that the Border

Corps is an equal-opportunity destroyer. About 20% of today's space marine crop are women, and they're trained to be every bit as stupidly efficient as the men. Upper-body mass doesn't count for much in zero-gee. The average training period runs about six months. Anyone who can put up with Darkside that long is prime cannon fodder... I mean, candidates for the Saviors of the Universe award.

A rotating guard of 50 marines keeps full-time watch over Darkside Base. Whether they're protecting, policing or harassing the rest of the complex depends on who you ask. Twenty to thirty Border Corps cadets train at the Facility, which is neatly separated from the main complex by a series of tunnels. Armories and equipment storage chambers mark the distance. In spite of their supposed duty to safeguard the other Base personnel, the marines regularly assault their peers for lack of anything better to do. Since the Neanderthal complement makes up about half of the base's population, there's not a whole lot that anyone can do about the problem. Official noises get made, of course, but boys will be boys, after all, and most incidents are swept under the lunar dust.

Every once in a while, things get crazy outside the base; people show up dead, and weird "aliens" start hopping about the moonscape. When that happens, the valiant Border Corps marines get out their guns and go target-shooting. They never seem to kill much, but the effort makes them feel better.



Ecology

Ecology? What a silly question. There isn't anything alive on the Moon, or in our bases. Well, except for the Void Engineers. At least, I *think* they're still living.

Actually, there are a few living things. Rats. Big, ugly, Norwegian rats. You can't keep a good rat down. I rather expect that rats were the only things that managed to escape the death of Icarus. Cockroaches. Cockroaches in space. Hate 'em. Don't have anything with more than four legs here, you know. But they got into Darkside and are as rife as the bugs the NWO leaves for surveillance. Big, clicking things that look like they should be wearing little hiker jackets and carrying switchblades. Armed vermin. That's what wanders Darkside. And they're a really good reason not to go into the dark, unused corners of the base. You never know when a small gang of rats might mug you for your dinner of cardboard paste.

Actually, there are a fair number of "reality deviants" plaguing the base on a semiregular basis. Of course, Border Corps trainees with Sanitation experts are dispatched to every disturbance, and all the deviants are eliminated as "security threats to the fabric of reality." At least, that's what's always published in the *Universal Update*, the monthly publication everyone in the Convention gets detailing all encounters and new developments and such. While I was there, I watched a detachment get sent out and half the detachment come back in, only to get shipped off to the Descartes Institute of Mental Health, a pack of gibbering idiots. The encounter was termed "a setback in defense that was rapidly remedied." Ain't the media grand?

What is the Cop?

*In pride, in reasoning pride, our error lies;
All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies
Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes:
Men would be angels, angels would be gods.
Aspiring to be gods, if angels fell,
Aspiring to be angels, men rebel,*

— Alexander Pope

The Copernicus Research Center, The Cop. It's quite extraordinary. Quite. From the depths of outer space, better known to the Engineers as the Deep Universe, you see something resembling a large, fairly dim star. And then you get closer, and you begin to see that there's something, perhaps a gas cloud, ringing the actual star, making it appear diffuse. Closer still, and you realize that there is a web of light surrounding the star, and within that network is a sphere, a remarkably large globe that contains the stellar material within it.

That's right, it's a Dyson sphere. A translucent Dyson sphere.

Oh, yes, I forgot to mention the threads. It looks like the entire thing, star, globe, network and all, are threaded with light like a pearl on a necklace. The strings, lasers

actually, go directly through the center, it seems, and straight off into infinity.

Then you actually arrive in the star's planetary region—hey, remember, this thing is *huge*—but there are no planets, just the sphere. Which star is it? Oh, something near Sol. Alpha Centauri, I believe. I cannot recall if it is A or B, The system is a binary, you knew that, didn't you? No? Oh, I could go on for hours about binaries... incredibly common, you know, fascinating revolutionary and rotational dynamics, The stars bulge on the sides closest to each other, you know that? Simplistic observation, but I could stare at them for days, just watching the bulges move and shift and....

Once you reach the immediate vicinity of the Cop, what you see is this massive orb, dancing with lights, bisected equatorially with a ring of darkness. And blazing pillars of light projecting from the poles. Oh, it's simply a glorious sight!

The star in the center is the most intriguing bit, though. At such a range, one can see that the star is no longer a sphere. No, not more lovely bulges around the middle. It's a torus.

What's a torus? A torus is a doughnut shape. A ring. It's got a hole in the middle, do you see? The star is a doughnut shape, a giant sphere wraps around it, and a laser network is arrayed around that.

Of course there's a way in. It would be stupid to build something like this without a way in.

Most of the original entry ports are closed. There used to be six, one at each pole. You *do* know that there would be three sets of poles in three dimensions? Oh, good, you're not entirely unschooled. Yes, well, four of the ports are closed now, leaving only the ones that run beside the laser columns. That can get dangerous, but as long as your navigational computer isn't on the fritz, it shouldn't be a problem. It's a problem when you get a drunken pilot who wants to fly in manually. That's when you vaporize your pilot's head and set up the nav computer.

The entry port and laser corridor stretches for miles, with metallic doohickeys protruding dangerously from one side and the concentrated light of a star searing by on the other. Not a time for playing games, though some idiots still do. One of those ways of weeding out bad space cowboys. It's all right to be a cowboy, or cowgirl, in the Void Engineers, as long as you're not bad at it, you know.

Finally, the corridor broadens and you're inside. Sensible flight paths then veer sharply away from the stellar lasers. The interior of the sphere is rather more congenial than the exterior. It's quite bright, actually, and the farther you get from the lasers, the more you are enveloped by the atmosphere. Yes, there's atmosphere filling almost all of the globe. It's blasted away from the star and the lasers, so it's thinner in those areas, but it's quite breathable elsewhere.

How big is it? About 1 AU in radius. AU. Astronomical Unit. The distance from the sun to the earth. About 93 million miles.

Yes, yes, that is rather large. But this is space we're talking about. You have to think big when you're dealing with space. Planet-spanning bases, time travel, universal conquest. You know, that sort of thing.

Just how much space is that? Heavens, I haven't done those calculations in years. I could tell you the volume of the sphere and such, but it would mean absolutely nothing to you, dear. Nothing at all. It would just be a number with a lot of zeroes after it. Just like seeing the actual size would mean nothing to you. The human mind really just can't conceive of how much space is encompassed by a Dyson Sphere. Think big and mind-boggling and you'll do just fine.

M.C. Escher's dreamland exists inside that cold, inflexible sphere. The only true gravity comes from the sun. The Cop itself has a bit of a spin, just enough to give it somewhat of an artificial gravity band around the equator. That's the dark line of demarcation that you can see from the outside. That's where some matter has collected and some plant and animal materials exist. Some of the Void Engineer facilities are here as well. The band itself is far more surface area than the surface of Terra. Just amazing.

Spinning alone in the vast breathable "void" are little planetoids, either "natural" or unnatural in origin. The natural ones are conglomerates of flora and fauna that live together for survival. The unnatural bits are usually laboratory groups. The lab conglomerates are truly boggling to behold. Usually, they comprise a number of different laboratory constructs linked together at a hub. They can be attached at any angle, with or without spin, and can be of any design. One that I belonged to had a sleek silver orb, a Skylab-type contraption and a Gothic cathedral all linked together.

Which one do you think was mine?

Oh, yes, there are bodies of water here as well. Huge, undulating raindrops. You've seen what water looks like in zero gravity, haven't you? Think of those little droplets floating around on camera in the space shuttle, only the size of the Pacific Ocean. More incredibly, a large number of those huge droplets are utterly sterile. Perhaps they've passed too close to the sun, or a laser, or perhaps they've never had the good fortune to stumble across any spores, plants or other bodies of water, but they are completely without contaminants. Oh, the Progenitors *love* these places. Gives them a chance to play god, or goddess, or something like that.

Yet some of these vast oceans teem with life. Some of them are hard to identify, because they've acquired some kind of algae or lichen that has enveloped the boundaries of the sea and entirely contain it in a network of greenery. No one has dared to penetrate those frontiers yet. Or if they have, they haven't returned to speak of it.

Now, once inside, you will notice that the lasers do not actually go completely through the sphere. The "north" and "south" lasers are independently generated from a maelstrom of energy on each side — you know, the "north" and

the "south" sides — of the star. Those sides correspond to the flattened sides of the star, the top and bottom of the doughnut if you will.

The reason that the star is flattened is that there are gravitational lenses above and below it. Those lenses reflect the gravity back on the star, pressing it into the torus, leaving a dark nexus that has been surrounded with gravity diffusers to make it zero-gee. The lenses *also* focus some of the electromagnetic radiation being emitted by the star into the lasers. Those lasers are the center of the defense grid. The energy storms are caused by the attraction of the electromagnetic energy to the gravity lensing.

You simply don't want to be near the north or south poles of the star or the Cop. Trust me.

History of the Cop

Never open the door to a lesser evil, for other and greater ones invariably slink in after it.

- Baltasar Gracian

Years and years ago, well before you were bom, the Dimensional Science Evaluation, Administration and Training Committee (DSEATQ) decided that Darkside no longer fulfilled the needs of the Void Engineers. Well, that's the party line. I think that a certain pressure was being exerted by the high muckety-mucks to get farther away from Earth and the rest of the psychopaths in the Technocracy. Besides, more and more of the influential research groups were moving farther and farther from Terra. There had to be a way to make the Void Engineer central base more accessible for the people doing wild and crazy research. The Moon was just a little endangered by the encroachment of the Horizon (and by other little anomalies, as we've seen).

They say it took them something like 40 years to plan and construct, then take apart and replan and reconstruct, and twist and change and adapt for unexpected gravitational forces, the Research Center. Engineers, don't you just love them? They forget that they're only human, and inevitably make mistakes. The mistakes made in building this place could be counted in bodies. Could be, except in many cases, the bodies couldn't be found. Hundreds died for the Cop, just to build it. Rather like the pyramids, I would suppose, or the Tower of Babel.

Finally, though, in the early 1970s, they cut the ribbon at the Halley Academy, and there was much rejoicing. The Cop had become, at various points, a thing of awe, of mockery, of disregard, and finally, of respect. It was the closest thing to the future the Technocracy had yet seen, a veritable crystal ball for the Technocratic Utopia. If they could create something like this, one of the seven wonders of the Deep Universe, they could certainly overcome human nature to make the Earth safe for humanity.

With the crash of a champagne bottle, the giant STAR engines were induced to concentrate the solar wind into one monstrous blast, and the Cop was spun to create simulated Earth normal gravity at the equatorial band. The

Halley Academy gently settled down to its appointed location with very little ado, and life went on.

After a few trees and rocks were attracted by the equatorial region, falling rather like meteors with some of the same regrettable consequences, it apparently occurred to someone to wonder what would happen if one of the droplet-oceans were caught. A buffer system was developed and installed shortly, its generators maintained in position by remote control from the Halley Academy.

Now, originally, mind you, the Cop was of a different design than it is now. The star in the center was untouched. There were no crystalline strands of energy. No, no, there were six enormous solar vents, one at each pole, and STAR engines installed in each of them to distill Quintessence for the lab groups' use as they moved their facilities into the Research Center and set up shop. Each pole was named for a famous physicist or astronomer: Schrodinger, Hawking, Bohr, Maxwell, Tsiolkovsky and Planck. All men, you'll notice. Then again, most of Science's "Grand Old Men" were indeed old men.

The design was lovely for a peaceful site of scientific research. Unfortunately, what many people forget is that the Deep Universe is rarely peaceful. Within a year of its completion, the Cop had its baptism of fire, and it failed miserably.

They say they've never been sure if it was an inside job or not, whether there were *barabbi* in their midst that they didn't know about. Of course there were, but whatever the case, the Nephandi and their allies simply walked in the front door, nearly undetected. I've heard that one young student noticed an anomaly, but when he pointed it out to his supervisor, the elder scientist threw a tantrum at him and shredded the readings.

Before anyone could respond, the two "polar" STAR engines were destroyed in shattering explosions. The Schrodinger sextant blew one way, the Tsiolkovsky another, and the entire sphere was thrown into a degrading wobble. I understand that it rather resembled a penny, spun on its edge. Then they threw their forces against the Planck engine, one of the "equatorial" vents, and severely damaged it. The carefully calculated equatorial gravity was negated, lab groups crashed down and up and sideways, atmospheric storms ripped through the sphere. You must understand that the explosions were more than planet-sized; think of what would happen to the Earth should the Moon be shattered! That's small-scale compared to what happened in the Cop. I don't think they ever got an accurate total of the deaths that occurred just in the first blasts. Again, with that sort of force in space, the bodies are rarely found.

The sphere was teetering on its precarious gravitational suspension, threatening to plunge unchecked into the heart of the star itself.

What remained of the marines in the Cop were scrambled to deal with the Nephandi. It was a brief and bloody battle, and resulted in the decimation of both sides. The things from beyond departed, no doubt satisfied with the havoc they had wrought.

Meanwhile, an emergency team of the best surviving Engineers gathered in the emergency control center in

DSEATC's main laboratory nexus. At least two members of the Committee died that day, burning themselves out and their machinery as well, but they managed to use the three remaining engines — Hawking, Bohr and Maxwell — to directionally vent solar wind in carefully calculated spurts. Well, that's what they'd have us all believe. They probably said, "Oh, shit! We have to stop this! Quick, guys, *do* something!"... and then they did it off-the-cuff and were incredibly surprised and relieved that it worked. They managed to almost completely stop the rotation and the wobble, which saved everyone who was stupid or unfortunate enough to still be somewhere in the Cop.

In the aftermath, the Engineers realized that their detection and defense grids had been next to useless. The Schrodinger and Tsiolkovsky engines were completely unsalvageable. They would either have to rebuild the Cop, and rebuild it better, or face becoming the laughing stock of the Technocracy. So, bold and intrepid individuals that they were, they decided to rebuild. Rather than try to rebuild the polar engines, Research and Execution created the polar gravity lenses. Originally, I think the idea was just to lase the star and create the satellite network for the new laser defense grid. Some wag then decided to doughnut the star, just to see what would happen, I suppose. At any rate, the defense grid went up, and the fixed satellite network they installed can now produce directional lasers capable of splitting most spacecraft into atoms. So they should be able to dent the occasional ravaging demon from the Void.

It's a high-maintenance design. So much so that the whole place has become rather a joke to the younger generation, myself included. We used to call it, "Tychoides' Folly," Tychoides is the leader of the DSEATC, and the Convention as a whole, as far as I understand it. The Cop is simply this cosmic white elephant, lumbering about, mostly useless. There will never be enough members of the Convention to utilize even one percent of the space in the Cop. It's just insane. Even if they created a planet and transplanted thousands of humans onto it—which the Progenitors would love, by the way, if they ever thought of it: captive human lab rats with no Paradox!—it would take millions of years for a population to even *begin* to strain the environment. It could be the perfect solution to creating the Utopia the Technocracy wants.

But I find it really difficult to believe that the Void Engineers created the Cop. So do many people, now that the Engineers have been somewhat demystified to the rest of the Technocracy. Even with every Technocrat pitching in together, something the size and scale of the Cop wouldn't be possible in a millenium, much less 40 years. They say that there is evidence — suppressed by DSEATC, of course — that the Cop is old, much, much older than the 30 or 40 years the Convention has been in possession of it. That it was built by someone — or something — else.

Do I believe the rumors? Think about it yourself, and see what you think after I tell you a bit more.

Points of Interest

How many interesting places can there be in a place that's orders of magnitude larger than the Earth? Well...

The Centrus Complex

At the center of the star, in the nexus, a spheroid construction nestles within a set of gravitational diffusers: the Centrus Complex. I suppose the name signifies the place's position at the center of the Cop. It's about a mile across, with a thick, reflective Layer to protect its contents from the heat and light of the stellar material surrounding it. From appropriate locations in the Cop, you can pick out the tiny bright point in the center, assuming you have sufficient filtering mechanisms on your telescope.

Naturally, the only way to get here is through the use of a Quantum Field Inverter with the appropriate coordinates — a transporter, if you must. Only two or three QFIs in all the Cop have the correct coordinates. Miss the right transport spot and you're toast.

According to what I've heard, the inside of the Centrus is null-gravity and very dark, with heavily polarized and radiation-shielded observation areas set all around the outside of the sphere. Some of the more mystically-minded Void Engineers retreat here for meditation, and some of those more inclined toward stellar dynamics set up semi-permanent data collection stations here. Supposedly, the very center of the Complex is an entirely dark room with no gravity, completely empty of everything but air, and quite thoroughly sound-proofed. Rumors say that some of the specialists from the Descartes Institute of Mental Health use this place as a sensory deprivation environment for extracting information or for performing experimental treatments.

The slender ring built around the Centrus Complex is a prototype Quintessence Furnace, collecting and distilling Tass from the vast energies of the nearby star. Once the collection process proves stable, the STAR engines can be taken offline once and for all, and all of the Cop's laboratories can be hooked to the Furnace, providing internalised self-sufficiency for the Convention, and increasing the security of the Construct.

A number of Void Engineer factions have been vying heartily for control of the Centrus Complex for a few years now. Last I heard, the applications were "in committee for discussion," which is another way of saying, "the admins aren't letting loose of it for nothin'."

The *Vivo*

Around the turn of the century, according to my source for this story, a team of far-traveling Void Engineers stumbled upon an apparent rogue asteroid drifting between stellar systems. Suspicious, they landed and discovered that it was no asteroid — the thing was a ship! This juggernaut, with what seemed like a mind of its own, let explorers penetrate its outer crust, but no

further. Several years of analysis led them to believe they could jury-rig a control center on the outside of the vessel, tapping a vast exoskeletal network into engine conduits, and into the impressive and terrifying weapons array. They did so, and happily brought this giant back toward the solar system.

After some sort of mishap with the main weapon — which, by the way, I believe involved the dropping of a miniature black hole on Tunguska, Siberia — everyone decided the ship was best left untouched until they could find a way to delve its internal enigmas. There has been a rotating team on it ever since, according to what I was told. I never joined the staff. I stayed away from everything that didn't involve my own research, you understand.

Ultimately, the *Vivo* was placed in orbit around the Cop. The Void Engineers keep it nearby for study, but far enough away so that no one gets tempted to fly off with it. Of course, should that misfortune ever occur, the Technocrats could be expected to blast the *Vivo* out of space, rather than let this marvel slip into other hands.

It's rather strange to look at... just a huge, dead lump of matter. But there's a feeling of something not-quite breathing on the back of your neck, something not-quite seen watching you, something taking a slow, deep, waking stretch and peering at you in slowly dawning comprehension.

The Hive

A slowly rotating, perfect, 10-mile-wide sphere of wrinkled gray parchment. No, really, that's what it resembles. Very much like the outside of a hornet's nest. It looks quite fragile, as if it would ravel apart upon first contact. One section of the wall has indeed torn away over the years, and inside you can see perfect hexagonal cells — each wall soap-bubble thin and transparent, with rainbows playing over what look like transient surfaces. I've been told that when these walls are touched hard enough to break them, they shatter, rather than pop, into crystalline fragments, and these shards vaporize as they touch other objects.

The odd part is that no one knows who or what built it, or how, or when. The Progenitors apparently deny any involvement, though they're willing to send in an analytical team. Respectful scientists that the Engineers are, though, they refuse to send anyone into invade it until they know if it belongs to someone.

The Halley Academy

The Academy is where all Void Engineer students learn how to be good little Technocrats, and to learn skills appropriate to the research they want to perform. It's quite a facility, complete with rather luxurious dormitories, hydroponic gardens, domestic animal farms, recycling plants, state-of-the-art research equipment, simulators, barracks for the enforcement divisions... just about anything you could ever desire in a Utopian technocratic environment to make it totalitarian... I mean, totally self-sufficient.

It's one of the few Void Engineer structures actually set on the equatorial surface, placed in a cleared area of rain forest they've managed to engender in some regions. The land around it is scarred by the vagaries of the complex itself during the Great Wobble episode, and probably will be for several years more before some topsoil resettles itself there.

The buildings themselves are designed to be as futuristic as possible, in a narrow sort of hard science-fiction way. As Darkside Moonbase was the vision of the future in the early 20th century, the Academy is built in a mosaic of visions, varying from Heinleinian to Roddenberryesque. It's a conglomerate of structures from several generations and a panoply of designers; sprawling in some areas, towering in others, yet somehow managing to be homogeneously bright and oppressive.

And then there was Life...

The inevitable seeds and spores and small lives that accompanied the Void Engineers out into the wide open spaces of the Cop have flourished and *changed*. The eternal daytime of a world built to surround its sun, the intense levels of radiation and Quintessence generated by that carefully manipulated star, and above all, the vast regions of space with breathable air and water provided, have all combined to form near-ideal conditions for the spread of life. The combination of radiation and free Quintessence provides impetus for a rapidly diverging population. The genetic diversity of the Cop is already supposed by some to be as vast in comparison to Earth, as Earth's is to the Galapagos Islands.

Galapagos Islands, with those tiresome finches. Haven't you ever taken biology? Saint Darwin, you know.

The Dyson sphere supports an astonishing variety of organisms. Recall that the entire globe is filled with breathable atmosphere, with the minor exception of a zone starting about 20 million kilometers above the sun's surface. Oh, yes, minor, believe me. Most of the known life here surrounds the comparatively narrow "gravity" belt of the equator, since most of the Void Engineers who knowingly or unknowingly carried the ancestors of the current organisms live and work in this region. As life creeps like a mostly green carpet away from its original landing place, it grows stranger and stranger, adapting to this enormous and un-Earthlike environment.

Well, it's un-Earthlike now. I don't know if it ever was Earthlike.

The Progenitors, thoroughly enveloped in their collective deity-complex, have carried out a number of experiments adapting Terran genetic material to gravity-free environments. Inevitably, a number of these experimental organisms, grown in their artificial wombs, have sprung forth into the ether of the sphere, either intentionally or accidentally. I shudder to think what some of the Progeni-

tor grad students have done in their spare time, or for class projects. I've heard something about Elvis sightings, but I prefer to disbelieve those rumors. The King doesn't really have much of a place in alien environments.

Generally, you'll find two types of creatures inside the Cop: the ones which prefer the surface and those which float through the atmosphere, though some may interchange between one environment and the other. Most of the recognisable surface-dwelling life is confined to within three million kilometers of the "gravity" belt, since it really hasn't had the time to travel any further. However, it is still something of a mystery how they managed to perambulate that far, most organisms not having spaceships. However, I think it's likely that some of them are taking advantage of Void Engineer vessels. Either that, or some of the mutations have developed faster-than-light travel.

The ground-dwellers along the equator closely resemble creatures from Earth. Plants of all sorts, mammals, insects and birds flourish, though close inspection reveals that new species already exist, probably through mutational sources natural and human. As things move away from the Earth-normal gravity at the central part of the band, they change. Plants become both taller and more deeply rooted. Animal life becomes both elongated and more fragile than its Earth counterparts.

Yes, fragile. You hardly need to waste energy making extraneous muscle and bone in zero-gee when you're worried about finding something to eat in all that space.

Under negligible gravity at the edges of the most fertile matter of the "gravity" band, plants begin to take on fantastic and impossible shapes: lacy fronds and threadlike "air roots" to gather water. They reproduce through runners and multiplication underground. Seeds are too chancy to cast off into a world where they may never touch ground at all. Trees may be literally miles tall, though their trunks and branches may be no thicker than a pencil. Animals develop wings far less exacting in their design than wings on Earth would be, and clawed or sticky feet enabling them to cling where they wish. Very pretty.

Remember, when there's no gravity, you can potentially produce escape velocity by exhaling too hard.

Many of the organisms that spring into being in the null-gravity zones also cast off into the atmosphere, either to stay aloft all their days or until they somehow manage to find other places to land. Insects have assumed truly Brobdingnagian proportions, while some mammals resemble air-gliding stingrays. Bats are among the largest of mammals, with monstrous wingspans and proportionally tiny, low-mass bodies, while birds quickly adapt to the demands for greater speed, while reducing their muscle mass required to stay aloft.

Of course, the first organisms to launch themselves into the atmosphere were unicellular, photosynthetic, and

asexually-reproducing. These qualities are musts if one is floating randomly around an environment so immense that no real chance exists of ever meeting another of one's kind. Eventually the larger organisms joined them, and together they began to form independent, floating ecosystems. Trees actually form the structure for many of these, growing completely spherical, with both roots and leaves thrusting outward from a solid woody core. A number of them have evolved broad paddle-like leaves whose sole purpose, besides photosynthesis, is to gently flap, rotating the epiphyte slowly so that all sides can take advantage of the eternal day. The largest reported tree was 60 kilometers across, slowly flapping its indolent way toward being quite planet-sized. I'm sure it contained more genetic variety in the animals and birds and bacteria it housed than most of the remaining sections of the Amazonian rain forests.

I've been told by a Progenitor I once knew that the strangest aspect of the trees is that they are something between a single giant tree and a colony of trees. The genetic material seems to be extremely mutable, and gradually changes from "branch" to "branch" and "trunk" to "trunk," so it is actually unclear whether each is a single organism with incredibly diverse genetic materials, or a community of organisms with rather similar genetic material. He seemed to think this was terribly fascinating and rare, I told him he should look carefully at any moderately complicated computer program to see something of the same sort.

Of course, the other major type of floating ecosystem is the dropler ocean, which I mentioned previously. Inside the confines of these oceans, "normal" fish live side-by-side with radially symmetrical "fish" — different species and different ecosystems in each ocean. Insects, and organisms rather removed from the genus of arthropoda, live on the

surface tension and flora of these oceans, and some of the "fish" have evolved air-swimming capabilities to hunt them.

So that's bugs, and birds, and fish, and plants, and bats. What else? Oh, yes, frogs. There are indeed frogs and their ilk hopping and slithering around, but they usually live only on the algal oceans. Some place to sit near water, you know, rather than being completely immersed. They thrive on these things. You can always tell when an algae glob is nearby, since it's always croaking with a chorus of bullfrogs.

An interesting note is that no one seems to have bothered to bring reptilian DNA with them to the Cop. Perhaps no one wanted a snake in this particular Garden.

The Cop has no nighttime, no light variations, no seasons and little weather save clouds and misty precipitation (though huge, ravaging wind storms are fairly common). Weirdly enough, the center of the star is the only place in the sphere which knows absolute darkness. But recall that much of the vast space available here is stark and sterile, the light brassy and unmitigated, and therefore, more terrifying for revealing so clearly what hides in the darkness.

Conclusion

Intriguing comparison, isn't it? Two important Void Engineer bases, so different it almost seems they were built by two wholly different Conventions. One, a tribute to a bleak horror of technological Utopia, and the other a tribute to the joys of biological diversity that at once defy and celebrate the technology around them.

Ah, but I'm waxing far too poetic, a sure sign I'm tired.

I certainly hope this helps your book, young Hastings. Do go ahead and mention my name. Perhaps I'm ready to die.

Or perhaps I'm prepared to defy technology.

The Gernsback Continuum



This is another dream, the dream of H.G. Wells, in which the tall elegant engines rule, with perfect benevolence, a humanity which has no business except to be happy. To H.G. Wells, this was a dream of heaven — a modern version of the idle, harp-resounding heaven of other childhood pieties.

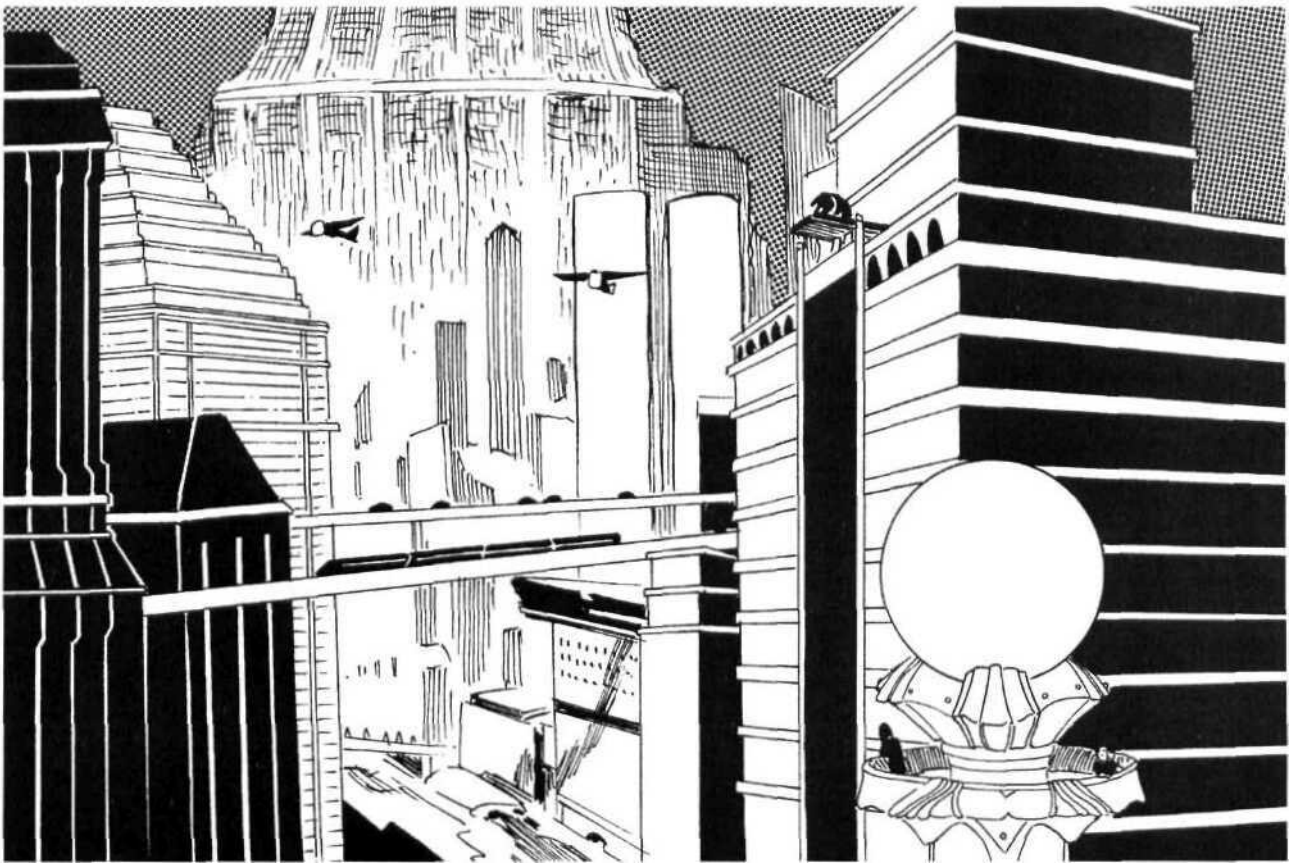
—Jacob Bronowski, *Science and Human Values*

Located in a great Horizon Realm, the Gernsback Continuum is one of the most celebrated of all the Tradition Realms, and rightly so. Over the past decade, hundreds of Etherites have combined their efforts to build this testimony to the power and glory of Science in all its forms. I, Caleb Whittaker, Son of Ether, take great pride in having been asked to write a treatise on it for the education of my fellows. And so, I introduce the Gernsback Continuum, a whizzing, wheezing, wheeling collaboration of purest innovation, awaiting the visitation of all Sons of Ether and their occasional guests.

Daytime in the Gernsback Continuum: Sunlight glints off argentine spires, satellite dishes and glass globes. Buildings strike up into the sky, a conglomeration of sharp lines, curving ornamentation and glass, Art-Deco monuments forming a levigate metropolis, a cityscape built to glorify the Gods of Science.

• Caleb Whittaker

A new and eager voice in the pages of *Paradigma*, Caleb studied under the esteemed Dr. Julian Spence, an apprenticeship prestigious enough to convince me that he should be included in this book. Perhaps in the future, Dr. Whittaker will prove a valuable member of our society. After all, someone who can portray our pride and joy with such elan while studiously avoiding certain important secrets promises to be a significant contributor to our journals and tour guides.



Metallic zeppelins, Etherflyers and jet-packed aeronauts vie with the clouds. Ether-powered phaetons zoom along raised highways like shiny silver beetles, their helmeted drivers looking out through rounded windshields. Scientists stroll or ride the moving sidewalks that parallel these highways, linking the magnificent buildings of the Realm. Their various old toys, equipment and apparel combine with the vehicles and the laboratories to produce a constant background song of zaps, crackles, bleeps and hums. The Gernsback Continuum is never silent.

By night, the Gernsback Continuum becomes a city of science-fictional tomorrow. The buildings light up, becoming uniquely beautiful monuments to Scientific excellence. In the sky, stars twinkle among giant planets: a Saturn, a Mars and a Venus. Magnified, these not-so-distant planets crowd in for a closer look at the Scientists, looming large and heavy over the Realm. Illuminated zeppelins struggle for primacy against this impressive backdrop of celestial bodies. Giant spotlight beams criss-cross the sky; and the electro-converters, hydro-accelerators, and ion dispensers drone in the background.

We, the Sons of Ether, built the Gernsback Continuum as a representation of our perfect Reality, a world in which Science runs free. Many of us remain in the Realm all our lives, performing experiments and investigating theories. Gleefully, we heat our test-tubes, argue our points, soar in our Etherflyers and fight our duels. For many of us, the Gerns is the closest thing to Heaven.

An Offering to Science

For years before they began its actual construction, the Sons of Ether Assembly debated potential layouts for their greatest Horizon Realm, Because it would be the most important of the Sons' Horizon Realms, many crucial design elements had to be hashed out. Overall, the plans which resulted perfectly expressed Scientific philosophies, and proved elegantly imaginative and appropriate.

More debate surrounded the choice of the Realm's name and the Assembly finally decided upon "The Gernsback Continuum," in honor of the extraordinary inventor and publisher, Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967). During his lifetime, Gernsback had received more than 80 patents for such advancements as an early form of the bone-conduction hearing aid and a sleep-learning device which he had dubbed the "hypnobioscope." A respected editor and publisher, Gernsback was the force behind *Modern Electric* magazine (which later became *Popular Science*), a renowned Son of Ether outlet for insinuating new technologies into the mainstream, and *Amazing Stories*, the first magazine devoted exclusively to science-fiction or "scientifiction," as Gernsback called it. In his lifetime, Gernsback himself contributed a great body of work to the genre. His technological foresight showed in his imaginative fiction. He predicted with startling accuracy a number of upcoming inventions such as radar, microfilm, artificial fabrics and fluorescent lighting. Gernsback was recognized

for his contribution to the advancement of the genre when the top annual prize for science-fiction novels was named the Hugo, in his honor. Although he was old when the Realm was completed, Gernsback himself was present at its official opening, and is said to have wept with joy.

Since its establishment, the Gernsback Continuum has changed little, yet the frenzied level of activity in the Realm stimulates the occurrence of many exciting and strange events. Thus the Gernsback Continuum has earned the nickname "The Realm That Never Sleeps."

Places of Interest

Where to begin? Such a fascinating place, with so much to do! Perhaps I should start where so many visitors and residents alike begin their journey to this wondrous world: on Earth....

The Great Hall Chantry

The Gernsback Continuum Horizon Realm can be reached through the Great Hall Chantry in Paris. Designed in the tradition of royal Parisian architecture, the Great Hall has only two levels, albeit tall ones. Located on the *Rue de Puilly*, near the Centre Pompidou, its large front courtyard accommodates panhandlers and street performers spilling over from the crowd at the Centre. The Sons of Ether appreciate the daring of young people who walk on broken glass and breathe fire, performing their tricks to an excited gathering of tourists and pigeons. The smells of butane and bodies mingle near the doorway of the Chantry.

I must confess that we have let our Great Hall go to pot somewhat; its upkeep, I fear, has been neglected in favor of the Gernsback Continuum. The interior decor has seen better days: worn, fabric-covered chairs surround square wooden tables. The lighting comes from dim overhead fixtures. The walls bear paintings and tapestries whose dusty surfaces dull their original splendor. Even the drapes have faded a bit with age. Although I notice only the aroma of aged pipe smoke, some visitors claim the Great Hall reeks of faded elegance and abandoned glory.

The Great Hall houses our esteemed yet un-Awakened colleagues and the newest members of the Chantry. Other than that, its rooms serve primarily as hasty meeting places, classrooms and settings for discussion groups. The more secretive and subversive *scientific* gatherings precipitate to this earthly Chantry.

Most visitors these days come solely to pass through to the Gernsback Continuum, where the real action takes place. The only three portals to the Realm remain hidden in remote corners of the Great Hall, guarded by special inventions designed to foil the unwelcome. Horace McKinney, the capable majordomo of our Great Hall, strictly guards all access to the portals through a series of checkpoints. His special sentinels, both human and robotic, wait at these checkpoints to screen visitors. Visitors

had best be prepared to answer many personal and professional questions if they wish to pass! Master McKinney has a long and illustrious history of dealing with intruders, and his experienced sentinels have many wonderful toys with which to pulverize unruly visitors. Only the overconfident and stupid would dare to be anything but polite to them. Any Son of Ether may enter the Gernsback Continuum; however, those who have gained Master McKinney's favor will of course receive priority status, while those who displease him would do best to avoid the Hall altogether.

Once the visitor has passed all muster, he or she is escorted to one of the wondrous portals. Tucked away in dark alcoves or behind faded curtains, these wooden doors teem with carved collages of aeronauts, rocket ships and streaks of lightning. The doorknobs glint with a special shininess, their brass polished by thousands of turnings. Beyond their doors lies the Gernsback Continuum,

The Great Hall on the Horizon

A mirror reproduction of the Great Hall exists on the other side of the portals, more brilliantly decorated and cared for than its mundane twin. Extremely elegant in comparison to the Earthly Great Hall, the Gernsback Continuum's Hall has velvet wall-coverings and heavy cherry furniture. Silver Art-Deco Lamps with fringed and Tiffany shades provide light above early 20th century chaises, high-back chairs and leather couches. The smell of cigars and cognac lingers in the air.

While the Great Hall Chantry in Paris has mock windows designed for outside decoration and inside privacy, the Great Hall of the Gernsback Continuum has floor-to-ceiling glass lining every exterior wall. This mighty mansion rests on a hill above the cityscape, looking out over a glorious view of the entire Realm. Robots scuttle here and there, serving drinks and tidying the rooms. Odd gadgets and thingamajigs hang on the walls and sit on tables, each with its own unique purpose.

Outside the building, a park of green grass and flowering trees surrounds the hill on which sits the Great Hall. Sculptures and fountains which move, spout and even spark decorate the lawn. A clear glass orb, 12 feet in diameter, occupies the front courtyard. At the core of this sphere, an electrode sends blue lightning leaping around inside. Anyone who touches the glass finds a bolt of electricity drawn to the point of contact, although she receives no shock. This orb serves as a monument to the late Nikola Tesla, one of the greatest Scientists to plumb the mysteries of Forces,

The residents of our wondrous haven ride through the park on bicycles covered with dials, lights and even rockets. Others coast by on jet-powered rollerskates. At a picnic on the lawn, young couples are served by robotic picnic baskets whose telescopic arms lay out the blanket, pass out the food and clean up afterward. The Sons of Ether do normal things—we simply don't do them in mundane ways.

The Assembly of Science

This powerful body convenes in the Great Hall of the Gernsback Continuum. The Assembly of Science initiates only those Sons of Ether who have proven themselves under extraordinary circumstances; as you can imagine, our definition of "extraordinary" is *truly* extraordinary! The Assembly hears and rules upon matters of dissent among Chantry members.

Honor Rock

On the far side of the city, a vast open area, roughly four football fields square, serves as the Realm's certamen dueling site. Honor Rock resembles a pyramid with the top sliced off. Stairs run up the side facing the Great Hall, flanked by a long snaking ramp for easy access of wheeled robots and personal vehicles. We Etherites call this *the Walk of Honor*, for all contestants must climb the stairs to the top.

Duels occur for many reasons, among them the resolution of disputes, defense of Scientific honor, or merely fun and practice. When Sons of Ether duel, we first must decide the method of combat. We may choose foot combat, with hand-to-hand or missile weapons, or personal vehicle combat with armored phaetons, a battle which ultimately resembles a Demolition Derby. In other duels, great Scientists may each pilot an armored zeppelin equipped with gamma guns and ray beam weaponry. These duelists attempt to out-manuever and shoot down each other.

Spheres summoned for Honor Rock duels appear differently than those used in normal certamen challenges (see *The Book of Shadows*). Instead of the traditional floating ephemera favored by so many of our mystic counterpart, we Scientists favor physical representations of the Sphere in question. Although such creations, made of energy rather than matter, are not true devices, they serve us well in the circle. The Sphere of Time, for example, may appear as a simulacrum of a hand-held dish with a firing array in the center, while Forces might appear as a lightning gun. When a duelist activates the Sphere, the array sends out waves of multi-colored vibrations which create the desired effect.

The Centers for the Advancement of the Sciences

In specially-advanced Research Centers, our students and Scientists investigate, study and invent the nine elements of reality. Here, we explore our theories and test our tools without fear of the Earthbound Paradox effect. Each of these Centers has special qualities in its design, qualities which reflect the nature of the laboratory's purpose.

• The John W. Campbell Center for the Study of Dimension Zero (Correspondence)

Clear, crystalline gargoyles perch atop this Gothic-styled stone and glass building, symbolizing the empty within the solid, the nakedness within the form. The Sons of Ether who work in the C.S.D.Z. investigate a dimension that cuts short the distance between two locations. In 1934,

John W. Campbell termed this dimension "hyperspace;" to honor his contribution to Correspondence theories, the building's designers chose his name to grace it.

• The Doomsday Building (Entropy)

Located on the edge of the Realm, Scientists in the Doomsday Building concentrate their research on the production of destructive devices. Out of necessity, the exterior of the building has been reinforced with a special Ether material, stronger by far than either concrete or steel. This heavy exoskeleton shines brilliant opal in the brightness of the Realm. Beautiful in its lines and exterior ornamentation, the building requires this extra insulation in order to shield the Continuum from any entropic mishaps which might occur within.

• The Electrodyne Towers (Forces)

Named for the Electrodyne Engineers who first began research into Forces in the late Victorian era, these two identical 10-story towers stand side-by-side. Combinations of copper and gold girders criss-cross between multi-colored windows, creating a giant three-dimensional stained-glass structure. Giant electrodes attached to the facing sides of the buildings produce electrical currents which leap periodically across the open air between them. Inside the towers, a network of laboratories continue to provide new insights into the natural Forces.

• The H.G. Wells Life Sciences Building (Life)

In this Center, Scientists study the Sphere of Life in all its many variations. Named for H.G. Wells, who co-authored one of the most famous books on the subject. *The Science of Life*, in 1931 and who made a lifelong study of the mysteries of biology, this building resembles a turn-of-the-century mansion, entwined with vines and surrounded by a rose garden. Its peaceful, healing energies are renowned among our Tradition, and many tired souls come here for rest and relaxation in the strange spa-like atmosphere.

• The Natural Philosophers' Tower (Matter)

Named for the Natural Philosophers' Guild, the true originators of our Tradition, this Center continues our ever-present explorations into the nature of the Absolute. Eventually, we will convince our Council companions that the origin of all other forms lies in the primordial Ether, incarnated in simple Matter. A solid black tower juts from the bare rock where the Center rests, its stairways climbing into the sky and descending deep beneath the Tower's foundations. Inside, dedicated Scientists carve ever deeper tunnels in search of the elusive Factor OX5, the keystone of our studies into the Tenth Sphere.

• The Metaphysics Lab (Mind)

Three spires rise from the corners of this triangular building, representing the creative, analytical and metaphysical aspects of the brain. The complex's surfaces reflect the Continuum back upon itself, a looking glass of self-examination and internal travel. Inside, Scientists create devices which enhance or destroy the abilities of the mind.

- **The Tower of Quintessential Power (Prime)**

The Continuum's greatest Node sits under the foundation of this building. A giant rod, driven down into the Node, taps Quintessence and draws it up into the hollow center of the tower. Translucent walls allow the glowing rod to be seen from the outside, a beam of blue neon shining within a block of ice. Here, Scientists study better ways to store and tap "the juice." Like the Wells Center, this facility provides a welcome respite for Scientists grown weary with long and fruitless studies. A short visit here allows them the strength to carry on.

- **The Center for the Advancement of Extradimensional Travel (Spirit)**

The tallest building in the Gernsback Continuum, the C.A.E.T. houses those Scientists who study the Etheric dimensions that make up the Tellurian. On top of the building, a glass dome houses their central offices and the control tower for their airfield. This vantage point allows them a spectacular view of the entire Realm, while Etherships and dimensional rockets take off from a grassy field next to the Center, practically under the Scientists' watchful eyes.

- **The Temporal Investigations Unit (Time)**

An Egyptian-red pyramid, covered with glowing mystical symbols, tops this square, blue, windowless building. The pyramid rotates slowly, coming full circle every hour on the hour. Here, Scientists who have turned their talents toward the development of time machines and the investigation into the nature and flow of time perform their arcane calculations. I am told they have perfected the impossible -- traveling back in time. Sadly, this supposed development remains confined to the Gernsback Continuum only, and very strict protocols prevent wide research, at least for now.

The General Mess and the Supply Mall

Even Sons of Ether need supplies to live and to perform their experiments. At the general mess, food is grown and processed, then sold in a market-like atmosphere in a giant warehouse of chrome and glowing tile. Everything you could desire from the mundane world, from "fresh" squab to cheeseburgers, is available here. Although many of the older Scientists prefer their synthesized foods in their traditional form, some of our more futuristic colleagues simply gulp down pills and drinks that combine the tastes of the "real" food with their nutritional capabilities.

At the supply mall, merchants licensed by the Assembly sell mundane (i.e., non-magickal) goods and services to Sons of Ether too busy to travel back through the portals to obtain their goods. This extremely profitable trade has produced an elite class of merchants; applications for approval are backed up several years. The Scientists living in the Continuum

purchase test-tubes, diodes, sheet metal, clothing, simply *everything* here. This remarkably large mall has nearly three miles of shops on three stories. If you need it, you'll find it here, from toilet paper to office supplies.

Ecology

All Sons of Ether visit the Gernsback Continuum at some time or other. Many live there full-time, conducting their research and their lives in complete rejection of the Earthly world's ugliness. Although I reject the notion that such isolation produces madness, these Etherites do tend to be somewhat out of touch. Nearly a hundred Scientists inhabit the Realm, and an additional 20 or so can be found visiting at any one time. Over a thousand un-Awakened companions, loved ones and robotic servants make up the rest of the Realm's population.

Over the years, the Gernsback Continuum has become its own society, with an infrastructure sturdy enough to support the people who have chosen to live there. A cross-city transportation system, consisting of raised highways and flying shuttles, allows citizens to travel quickly and easily from one place to another. These highways connect all the buildings, and mass transit stops are made at each one, every five minutes or so. Personal vehicles, called *phaetons*, use the same highways, zooming around the city like bubbles of skittering mercury. The zeppelins, which dot the sky, do not serve the same functional purpose; instead, they are for duelling or sight-seeing, rather than for actually propelling people from one place to the next.

Because so many have made the Gerns their permanent home, it has developed an economy all its own. Residents of the Continuum use a system of currency, called the G.C., for all intra-Realm commerce. The G.C. is a gold coin which can be used to purchase supplies and services from other inhabitants of the Realm. Approximately 10 G.C.s will purchase a meal and 500 will lease a house-robot for a year. The coins come in denominations of one, 10, 100, and 500. As you can imagine, counterfeiting, though possible, is grounds for permanent expulsion.

At the general mess, a giant farm and grocery store, robots and other automated systems produce food and water for the entire Realm. Many of the necessary raw materials are shipped in from the Earth, although special Life Sciences are used to genetically enhance the vitamin content and growth rate of vegetables. Food produced in the Continuum begins in pill form. When water is added, it expands into a full meal, warm or cold as warranted, with all the aroma and taste of a home-cooked supper.

Beneath the city, out of sight, great pipes connect the buildings. This arterial system carries waste in its many forms to a central processing plant beneath the Doomsday Building, where it is destroyed. Special Sanitation Robots, jokingly nicknamed *Laxatives*, roam these sewers, ensuring that all runs smoothly.

The ever-present robots serve a necessary role in the day-to-day maintenance of the Realm. Scientists create them to perform the routine jobs so necessary to an efficient community. Each robot, oddly unique in shape and design, has a specific job. Together, they zoom from place to place, performing their duties, or park patiently to one side waiting until they are called or needed. These robots sweep, dust, cook, and even do windows. If there is a task to be accomplished, there exists a robot designed to perform it.

The Sentinels of the Great Hall

Those brave folk chosen to man the checkpoints in the Parisian Great Hall must prove themselves trustworthy and accomplished Scientists before the critical eye of Master McKinney. These sentinels work in pairs, screening each visitor. Any challenge to their authority will be met with equal or greater resistance, depending on circumstances. These

sentinels are under strict orders to protect the portals at all cost; while on duty, they take no chances and trust no one.

Although they realize the seriousness of their duties, many sentinels use their positions to harass new visitors to the Realm. Some mislead newcomers into strange and embarrassing situations by making up their own admission rules. One of the most famous "pranks" involved a newly Awakened Son of Ether visiting the Gernsback Continuum on the orders of his mentor. The sentinels on duty that day convinced the young man that he had to remove all his clothing before he could pass through the portal. The naive young man believed them. It caused quite a stir when he crossed over into the midst of a crowded room, naked. The sentinels responsible were punished, but not harshly. Vigilance, even if occasionally mischievous, is essential when guarding so precious a Realm.

All hail Science, the savior of Humanity!

Midrealm



*I am Forethought,
The Death and Resurrection god,
The Flayed One, the Scapegoat.
For three eternities,,
I have hung upon these hooks in the searing
heat-haze,
My flesh burned and bleeding.
Each night, the Creeper comes to torment me,*

*To consume my flesh and burn of my blood,
This, is my Self-sacrifice, and punishment in advance.
Each morning, I am born again with greater insights.
In the pain and ecstasy of death,
I learned of runes and charms, the nature of sin,
I sent these secrets to human-kind,
Along with community and cultivation,
Hope and faith, fire and invention.
For this boldness, I punished myself,
By hanging from the hooks,
My flesh burned and bleeding.
Far I am Forethought,
The Death and Resurrection god,
The Flayed One, the Scapegoat.*

Aboriginal gods and spirits wander freely across all of the Middle Umbra, from the Penumbral reflection of Earth to the Near Realms of Garou Cosmology. Yet when some significant issue arises, concerned parties meet here in Midrealm for discussion.

Midrealm is aptly named. Not only does it lie in the Middle Umbra, but most Umbrood contend it exists at the very center of Reality, known to some of you mages as the Correspondence Point and to others as Mount Qaf. The validity of this claim is

not confirmed (or denied, for that matter) at this time, even by your so-called "Masters of Correspondence." More symbolically, "Midrealm" refers to the place's reputation as a neutral meeting-ground for spirits of all kinds. Spirits who gather here to discuss matters beyond Earthly import.

Background

These spirits tell a myth, one widespread and consistent to a remarkable degree with many of our own:

At first, there was nothingness — the Wyrms, the Void, Oblivion, Entropy, This Void persisted indefinitely, since even Time had yet to be conceived. Then suddenly, a drop of Wyld, of primordial essence, splattered into the Void. Another drop followed the first, then another. Where drops of Wyld struck the Void, the two essences canceled one another. Something was created. This Something (also known as Pattern or the Weaver) took the form of a single seed. Fed by the erratic Wyld-Void reaction, the seed grew into a sapling: the Alder Bole. As

• An Anonymous Description

The traveler who wrote me this account desired that I keep his name a secret, and I have. His research has proven to be valuable to my Chantry mates in the past, so I asked him to detail a Realm he frequents on his journeys, a Realm somewhat apart from the Near Realms described in Chapter Two. A Realm not quite "Horizon Realm," one beyond all simple categories. Supposedly, this place bridges the paths of all Three Worlds. Deeply hidden, this Umbral Garden may answer questions many of us are too insecure in our own beliefs to ponder, I leave conclusions up to you.



the tree grew, its roots spread across the Void and eventually covered it completely. And yet, the Alder Bole continued to grow, its vast and wide-reaching network of branches brushing the High Umbra. At the tips of each branch, a bud opened and a new Realm blossomed. Meanwhile, its roots had burrowed into the Low Umbra, giving form to the Lands of the Dead. This part of the myth explains why the Alder Bole reaches into many Realms,

According to myth, the Alder Bole gave form to other things as well — the Sisters, Umbrood and aboriginal spirits, and entities you would consider "gods." Where Pattern was most vital — in the Middle Umbra around the trunk — a physical reality eventually formed: the Earth, its elements, animals, plants and mortals. In short, all things sprang from the Alder Bole.

At present, the Alder Bole is stable and wide-reaching. Yet Wyld essence continues to fall on the upper branches. Here dwell minions of Dynamism, such as the Protean Hawk. The Void still exists, as well. One of its minions, Typhon, gnaws upon the roots of the Alder Bole. Most spirits believe that the Void will eventually free itself, the Alder Bole will fall, and reality will collapse. They also believe that falling Dynamic essence will strike Entropy to create another pocket of Pattern. And thus a new cycle, and a new reality, will begin.

Midrealm itself exists at the base of the Alder Bole, where ground girths the trunk of a mundane tree. The curious among you — but aren't all humans curious at heart? — probably wonder how you might reach this Realm. Perhaps you should begin by meditating on arcane patterns which unwittingly evoke the Alder Bole: the rood or cross, the swastika, mythic accounts of the Tree of Life, or even a simple tree. The Alder Bole is the beginning and center of all things; its influence is omnipresent and universal.

Places of Interest

For the point about Hell — as of Heaven — is this: when there, you are in your proper place, which, finally, is exactly where you want to be,

— Joseph Campbell, "The Mythology of Love"

Midrealm's Barrier and Beyond

Surrounding Midrealm is a mystic barrier, a shimmering rainbow wall of unimaginable height (seemingly reaching the Horizon itself). On closer inspection, a wanderer might realize that the barrier consists of an unknown type of Quintessence: neither free for collecting, nor shaped into a raw Pattern... unknown, at least, as mages understand things. Four burbling, ephemeral rivers issue forth from the barrier at what would be considered the cardinal points on Earth, and they continue off in four directions.

The barrier is almost impervious to attack. Certainly, no wanderer I've met could create a permanent breach, and I've known Grand Masters in my time. Experienced Spirit-mysticks find that they can push through the barrier, just as they would Earth's Gauntlet. Strangely, those leaving Midrealm face no resistance.

Within the Realm, the first thing visitors notice is the Alder Bole. Though it stands far distant, the human wanderer must strain her neck to follow its trunk from tangled roots to mist-distant boughs. Its crown brushes the Horizon; its branches penetrate the barrier. Four rivers gush from beneath the great trees' roots. Though overshadowed by the Alder Bole, the rest of the Realm is no less remarkable. From barrier to Bole stretch vast swaths of meadow and glade, forest and wetland. Each one of the hundreds of biomes supports abundant animal-spirits and ephemeral foliage.

The Alder Bole

Depending on one's perspective, the Alder Bole could easily be called the Tree of Life, of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; the Sacred Tree; or the World Tree. The Alder Bole is said to have existed since earliest times, even to have spawned many Realms. A manifestation of Pattern (or the Weaver), it is certainly one of the last vestiges of pure creation remaining. The Pure Ones are said to have sheltered themselves beneath this tree, and some claim that the One Itself climbed the Bole's branches and hung upside down searching for wisdom.

The Alder Bole leads to many Realms. The upper branches reach into Realms on the High Umbra, while the dark burrows beneath its roots descend to the Lands of the Dead. Worm-holes within the bark run between the Realms into what travelers call the Zones, and the Bole's leaves drift upon Deep Umbral winds. By following the great tree's swaying shadow, one can travel to any place in the Middle Worlds. These paths are safe and swift, though not without complications. The Protean Hawk that wheels about the upper branches demands an ever-changing toll. Travel beneath the roots takes one past the subterranean lair of Typhon, where the bones of gods bleach in an eternal sunshine.

As wondrous as the Alder Bole itself is its yield. The Fruits of Eternity are seedless, with golden skin and juicy-sweet, honeycombed flesh. Besides being rich in Tass, legend suggests that the fruit can have a wondrous effect — immortality or enlightenment — upon those who eat of it. Unfortunately, Typhon tends to hunt those who tamper with the fruit, so the truth behind such legends is difficult to confirm.

The Hall of Many Meetings

At the base of the Alder Bole, nestled between gnarled roots, lies the Hall of Many Meetings. This great longhouse is about 150 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 50 feet

high at the gables. Its wooden walls seem as sturdy and immortal as Time itself. Depending on one's perspective, its architectural detail might resemble that of a Viking greathall, an Amerindian longhouse, a bamboo jumba, or a wooden pagoda. The interior is decorated by painted skins and detailed, carved reliefs in many different styles. Five hearths waft rainbow vapors through five smoke-holes in the roof.

The Hall serves as the meeting place for aboriginal spirits and other Umbrood. The nature of Midrealm is "common council," a remnant of the days before Babel. All voices carry weight here. Whether aboriginal spirits are meeting or the Hall is otherwise vacant, three beings are always present: the Sisters.

Ecology

Midrealm's "native wildlife" includes animal spirits, Glade Children and Elementals of the four most common varieties. Other spirits hold council at the Hall of Many Meetings, or pass through while using the Alder Bole to travel between Realms. The following Umbrood dwell in Midrealm only, and never leave.

The Sisters

The Fates lead those who are willing; those who are unwilling, they drag.

— Seneca

Known as Fate, Being and Necessity, the Sisters resemble dark-skinned women in simple gowns and bare feet. One is wrinkled, the second worldly and mature, the third fresh and innocent. Though these forms are not their true ones, no one visitor has seen them otherwise.

No one truly understands the Sisters (as they are formally called), but many claim they are but one of the manifestations of Crone, Mother and Maiden. Spirit lore credits them with the existence of spirit and mortal alike. Supposedly, Fate defines an individual's pinnacle of existence, his or her best possible destiny; Being rules over daily happenstance and chance, which might end existence prematurely; Necessity oversees one's internal well-being (aging, illness, etc.) Whether these claims are true or not, all afford them respect. On a few occasions, intervention by the Sisters has been enough to quell an argument between even the haughtiest Umbrood.

Forethought

Nestled between roots of the Alder Bole stands a copse of tall pines. The lowest boughs are 30 feet off the ground, allowing for clear visibility. In the midst of the copse, a large, well-muscled man hangs suspended from dozens of chains, secured by hooks pierced through his skin. Beneath him, a patch of flowers and ferns poke up through the blood-nourished soil.

This is Forethought. He holds no affiliation, and hails from a time before the Earth's formation. His self-imposed punishment is this: by day, he hangs exposed to the elements in a near-death trance; by night, Typhon consumes a part of him. Such suffering will not kill him, as he is eternal. Instead, the ecstatic experience provides him with hidden insights, which he has shared with mortals in the past.

Should someone ask Forethought the destined question, "What ails thee?" the hooks finally rip through his flesh and he tumbles to the ground. Chains immediately wrap around the stranger and haul him up into the boughs. Forethought rises, quickly regaining his strength, and looks at his savior: "By taking the mantle of suffering upon yourself, you have confirmed my faith in humanity." He then departs, to begin a mortal life.

Until someone else asks this same question, the new Forethought is destined to suffer continual torment. Fortunately, until freed, this new man can be considered a demigod; he will not die, despite his own desire to do so. The second consolation is that, if finally freed, he will have gained many insights.

Typhon, Jagglings of Ialdabaoth

An aspect of the Eternal Wyrms Ialdabaoth, Typhon is a giant twisting serpent with centipede legs and a head at both ends. This dark beast coils beneath the Alder Bole's roots, gnawing at the Patterns of Reality and guarding the way to the Lower Umbra. Occasionally, it ventures forth to cause grief for those seeking the Fruits of Eternity.

The Protean Hawk

The Protean Hawk is a manifestation of Dynamic essence residing in the highest branches of the Alder Bole. A creature of chaos given static form and sentience, it patrols the byways towards the High Umbra. Travelers are expected to pay a variable toll before being permitted passage.

The fruits and plants of Midrealm are nutritious to eat, but poisonous if taken from the Garden. Those who would leave the Realm must pass through the shimmering rainbow barriers once again. Although it is said that a mortal visitor may enter only once in a lifetime, I have been to Midrealm many times. But then, by most accounts, I am not mortal, and know little of your ways.

Fare you well, good sirs and madams. And be careful what you do.

Victoria Station



Innumerable Suns exist; innumerable Earths revolve about these Suns in a manner similar to the way the seven planets revolve around our Sun. Living beings inhabit these worlds."

— Giordano Bruno, February 17, 1600
(just before being burned at the stake)

Victoria Station is a wonderful Neo-Baroque edifice of marble and glass. Doric columns support the sculpted facade, and the main structure is topped by a copper dome, tarnished a marvelous shade of turquoise. It looks much like any railroad terminal built in 19th-century England. The only difference is that this one stands on a chunk of ephemeral rock floating through the electromagnetic currents of Luna's Horizon. In layman's terms, it's a space station orbiting the Moon... in the spirit world, no less!

From this forward base, Sons of Ether launch missions of exploration into Etherspace, also known as the Deep Umbra. Only three ways of reaching Victoria Station exist; first, by Umbraship; second, by employing powerful Spirit magick; third, using some sort of teleportation device (but if such a "transporter" exists on the station, it is not common knowledge). Void Engineer sentry satellites make the journey difficult, but every attempt these brackish fools have made to assault the Station has failed. As far as I know, they have since given up hope for such malfeasance.

Background

Originally, Victoria Station was a part of rail baron (and Electrodyne acolyte) Stephen Lawrence Robenson's Trans-Spatial Railroad. The year was 1871. Through a network of teleportation tunnels and Spirit gates, this intriguing venture attempted to link the world by rail. At first, only select Awakened conductors knew the routes; but eventually, it was hoped this mode of transportation would be available to everyone! Victoria Station stood in the Penumbra of London, anchored to several powerful Nodes and protected by a deserted warehouse (its material shadow).

To the detriment of Progress, the Trans-Spatial Railroad project ended in disaster. After only a dozen runs, the *Spirit of da Vinci* took a wrong tunnel and disappeared from existence. After a flurry of finger-pointing, the Electrodyne Engineers began multiple investigations into the cause of the "accident." The results were inconclusive. Ultimately, they placed blame on a combination of "human and technical error" and then attempted to forget the whole embarrassing experiment. Victoria Station fell into abandonment.

(As an aside, one Euthanatos claims that the train and its crew — including many noble Scientists — was sidetracked into the Low Umbra. At midnight on each anniversary of its disappearance, one can supposedly spot the train at certain haunted switching yards. Currently, Professor Neon is perfecting ectoplasm-sensitive photographic plates with which to confirm or refute this rumor.)

- From Doctor Van Baas

When Alexis Hastings asked me to write the Victoria Station chapter of her new Realm traveler's guide, my reaction was two-fold. First, I was quite honored, Alexis is a capital mage, -and a close friend — she and I collaborated on a number of experiments and even a few articles for Paradigma: "Prominent Daughters of Ether" [Vol. 82, No. 3], "Blueprint for an Enviro-suit" [Vol. 84, No. 2], and "Kelvin 6500: The Melting Temperature of Primium" [Vol. 89, No. 1].

My second reaction was confusion. Though an Ethermage, I have only visited Victoria Station on a handful of occasions. The first was shortly after Graylock Chantry was destroyed; in the course of being assigned as chief engineer aboard the starship Etherjammer, I made a layover at the station. Since then, I've spent a couple shore-leaves there. As Alexis has since explained, it was precisely this "visitor's perspective" she sought.

In writing this entry, I wish to thank Professor Dubrius for making time for an interview, and security specialist Henri Maudir for his guided-tour of the station.

Cheers!

— Doctor Van Baas

The history now fast-forwards a dozen years, to 1893. Captain Horatio Savage had just returned from his moon-landing. His original crew were missing, his Vernwell rocket virtually shaken apart at the rivets. Shockingly, Savage refused to publish his findings! In his one memo to the Inner Circle, he stated simply that "Luna is unworthy of further scientific research." A year later, the hastily funded Void Seeker probe *Raptus* was destroyed upon contact with Luna's surface. This has been the case with every attempted landing since.

Let us return to Captain Savage. Despite his apparent failure, Captain Savage was even more insistent on exploring the Deep Umbra. However, he knew a forward base would be necessary. When the Order of Reason refused to fund him — and even fellow Electrodyne Engineers failed to support him (a bit of petty academic vengeance) — Savage uttered a dramatic oath and went his own way. A week later, the captain's peers were buzzing with news of Victoria Station being ripped from the Penumbra and reestablished in orbit around Lima. Rumor had it that Savage had rediscovered Arcadia, the Faerie realm, and had made some sort of pact with the fae. True or not, Victoria Station is something of a wonder. Unlike the vast majority of Horizon Realms, this one is located in Luna's orbit — not Earth's — and draws Quintessence from that realm.

Despite his earlier rash words, Savage made it clear that fellow Ethernauts were welcome aboard the new

base. One of the first to receive an invitarion was Dubrius (then just a Student). This was quite fortunate. Dubrius' newly-patented Oxygen Engine — originally designed for submersibles — made life much more comfortable aboard the Space Station Victoria.

When the Electrodyne Engineers defected to the Council, Victoria Station became an Ethermage-only club. Void Engineers were banned. Even mysticks from other Traditions could come aboard only as guests of an Ethernaut. Since then, the history of the station has been relatively uneventful. Let me mention one point of interest: Professor Dubrius was aboard Victoria Station on July 20, 1969 and reports that no mortal landed on the Moon. "Rubbish. Nobody since Horatio Savage has set foot on Luna. That is irrefutable fact. Humph. Jules Verne may have invented science fiction, but the Void Engineers perfected it."

[Editor's Note: When the Fisher Princess and I interviewed Dr. Catherine Nichols, rogue Void Engineer, concerning the possible existence of any Technocracy bases in the "Deep Universe" (as they call it), her answer gave me quite a shock. Dr. Nichols claims that a Darkside Moon Base has existed since the 19th century! (For the complete account, check elsewhere in this chapter.) I passed this information along to Professor Dubrius. Initially, he scoffed at this "load of rubbish," However, I have heard rumors that — as of this very writing — a team of Ethernauts is preparing to survey the far side of the Moon with the most innovative scanning devices available. Until this contradiction is cleared up, I thought it best to publish both "truths" verbatim. — Alexis]

Places of Interest

Disintegrations and air pollution strictly prohibited.

— Brass plaques posted at each spacedock entrance

Outside

The station's foundation resembles one-half of a spherical asteroid, a quarter-mile across. The top is smooth and flat, covered in manicured lawns, trees, paved walkways, a few stray rail tracks, and buildings. The underside looks like a plaster cast of some mundane moon crater. The entire body is contained within an artificial atmosphere. Every so often, bubbles of steam, smoke or carbon dioxide break loose and drift into the Ether.

Four spacedocks fork out from the edge of this asteroid. No more than cast-iron girders, wooden planks, and chain-and-post moorings, they are ugly things, yet utilitarian. Usually, one or two of the station's Umhrships are docked here. The sister ships SES *Nautilus* and SES *Argo*, shaped like barbed arrowheads, are

classified as cruisers. Each is supposed to carry four crewmen and a 10-man boarding party. More often, they ferry Ethernauts to and from Earth.

On the lip of the asteroid, between the docks, stand rows of warehouses (rumored to house moth-balled inventions and strange discoveries). Not only do these buildings provide a protective perimeter, but they also prevent absent-minded Scientists from falling off the edge. Dominating these lesser structures like the monarch it was named after, Victoria Station stands large, harsh and imperious at the center of the asteroid.

Inside

The station's main doors are 10-foot-tall, brass-bound, maple monsters, replete with grotesque knockers. When they open, a gong echoes through the station. Visitors enter a spacious lounge/anteroom, roughly 40 feet by 40 feet, decorated with plush chairs, a great fireplace (in which burns a greenish fire), oaken coffee tables, oil-paintings of illustrious Sons of Ether, brass etherlamps, an Indian rug, and even a billiard table. The room smells of imported coffee mingled with tobacco.

Here, guests are met by Thea, the resident robotic domestic, a charming android hostess who resembles a Maxfield Parrish dream girl in bare feet and a flowing gown. Few human socialites could match the gracious wit and etiquette Thea displays. It's a shame her memory circuits are so fallible — she rarely remembers a face past the first meeting.

Immediately beyond the lounge lies a great hall (80 feet by 240 feet). Two stories tall and running the length of the building, it looks much like a church nave. On occasion, it has doubled as a ballroom. Dozens of doors lead from the aisles to the restaurant and kitchen, library, chapel, public water-closets, secret passages, the security office, and other places. The upper gallery doors lead to guest rooms and to the private suites of those who live aboard the station.

A swaying spiral staircase climbs to the observation dome. Through telescope or viewport, one can view Earth, Etherspace and the Moon,

Below

A few other rooms have been catved into the asteroid itself. Below ground proves a perfect spot for laboratories, since even ephemeral stone is excellent for muffling the sound of explosions and the occasional scream (done for effect by beautiful and weak-willed lab assistants, hired expressly for this purpose; trust me...). One very secure room houses Professor Dutmus' Oxygen Engine. This device transforms rock, garbage, and nearly anything else into breathable air. Anyone found tampering with it will be immediately exported, with or without transport, depending on the outcome of an ad hoc trial.

Ecology

The station's grounds are home to a few Earthly life forms: grass and trees (imported), and mice (stowaways). In addition, plant-creatures known as *moSSLings* are indigenous to the rock. Somewhat resembling a sponge, Mosslings can drift through the Umbra or slowly crawl along solid surfaces. They seem to ingest raw Ether and produce Tass as a by-product. Gathering the Tass is a bit difficult, as it takes the form of needle-thin stands, hundreds of feet long; Mosslings also have very slow metabolisms, and produce only about one Dram of Tass per month.

Scuttlebutt has it that invisible Brownies live on (or at least regularly visit) the station. Broken objects are mysteriously repaired, and unfinished work is sometimes completed by the next day. It is even said that the station's steady orbit is due entirely to faerie glamour.

As for the mage presence, three Awakened Ethernauts reside aboard the station permanently. These are;

- Professor Dubrius, the station's current commander, best known for inventing the Oxygen Engine. A bit eccentric, perhaps, this esteemed Master Scientist drifts from subject to subject during conversations. Although he seems a grandfatherly chap, a few cocky young pups have learned the hard way that this aged Scientist was once a accomplished pugilist.

- UrrRe'ok, a saurian envoy from another time. She resembles a pink protoceratops (a dinosaur related to the more familiar triceratops) and works strange magick. Supposedly a refugee from a long-perished saurian race on Earth, UrrRe'ok communicates telepathically in English, German or French and constantly warns us that our probing into the Deep Umbra will lead to disaster. For all you skeptics, Urr is not a figment of my imagination. Compared to some of the things I have seen while serving aboard the Etherjarnmer, a sentient dinosaur is positively commonplace!

- Margrave Karl-Werner Luftwelle III, a distinguished old-world gentleman with interesting theories about the Umbral Realms and an abiding skill at cards. Despite his inherited title, Luftwelle is the most progressive Scientist aboard and an expert in the neglected field of trans-dimensional communications. His manners are impeccable — he build and programmed Thea — but I can attest that he is the most accessible of all those who dwell within the Station.

Six acolytes act as servants and technicians. Their current roster includes a cook and a waiter (both based in the restaurant), a janitor, a general laborer, Thea the robotic domestic, and security specialist Henri Maudir. Maudir patrols the station in the full dress uniform of a 19th century hussar, complete with sash and medals. Very proud and serious about his job, he is equally competent with ray pistol, saber, and the science of deductive reasoning.

Captain Tiberius and my crewmates from the Etherjarnmer visit frequently between Deep Umbra assignments, as do many other Sons of Ether. Even a few Tradition spirit-walkers occasionally drop by for a visit. Although the residents of this entertaining Realm seem quite preoccupied with their research, all of them gladly assail visitors to attain a bit of gossip about their former home, our Earth.

Verbena Seasonal Realms



A grave there was, untouched by men's hands from ancient times, whose interlacing boughs enclosed a space of darkness and cold shade, and banished the sunlight far above. No rural Pan dwelt there, nor Silvanus, ruler of the woods, no Nymphs, but gods were worshiped there with savage rites, the altars were heaped with hideous offerings, and every tree was sprinkled with human gore.

—Lucan (Marcus Annaeus Lucanus), *Pharsalia*

The Verbena Seasonal Realms, which exist within the Shade Realm of Life — shadow of the planet Venus, if you're a rocket-jockey — are actually four separate places. It is possible they are all linked by mysrick byways, though we Verbena haven't discovered more than a few of them. If the ancient lore holds true, other byways might resemble wells, rainbow bridges, rings of mushrooms, or any sort of hole in the natural environment (e.g., a cave or hollow log). Most life-mages, though, treat each as a separate Realm, and resort to more usual means of traveling to and from. How do you get there? If you don't know, you're not welcome. Other mysticks have a difficult enough time finding the Seasonal Realms. They don't need the corpses of novices to trip over.

Background

Verbena tradition holds that all of the Seasonal Realms once existed on Earth, and that Lilith, our semi-legendary "founding mother," saved them during the fall of the Mythic Age. Each Realm has a unique history,

- **Winter Castle:** Once the palace of the Dragonlord Viouvre, this castle in the French Alps was thought to have been pulled down during a Jacquerie uprising in 1361. Wrong! Winter Castle was rediscovered by Primus Nightshade sometime between 1457 and 1466, as a result of a conversation with a Hermetic mage she met during the Grand Convocation.

- **Spring Cottage** (An Giblin Coille): A strong Verbena presence has long existed in eastern North America. Our exact history is debatable: whether life-mages always existed alongside spirit-shamans, whether they came ashore with Leif Ericsson in the late 9th century, or whether they arrived with the pilgrims in the 17th century remains a controversial subject. In any case, our predecessors sanctified a number of Nodes to their purposes. One such site was a quaint rustic cottage — the home of a sin-eater or a medicine woman; the accounts vary. Located in the backwoods of the Catskill Mountains, it held out against "Reason" until 1913. When all memory of it had slipped from the minds of the locals, it shifted into the Umbra. A vision of Spring Cottage appeared to Lady Charlotte Quay in 1969,

during her Awakening. More powerful Verbena subsequently located the Cottage in An Giblin Coille ("April Forest"), a primordial springtime Realm. Soon, the Cottage, the only man-made feature in the place, gave the Realm a new and more familiar name. Sticklers for tradition still call the Realm by its older name,

- **Summer Grove:** Supposedly, this Realm was once a part of Prester John's kingdom, which stretched from Ethiopia to Zimbabwe. In 1165, this enlightened African monarch sent a letter to the Holy Roman Emperor and the Byzantine Emperor of Constantinople. He claimed to rule a kingdom as full of marvels as the Low Mythic Ages, where mortal, mystick and mythic beast coexisted. This news disturbed the philosopher-scientists of Europe (and later, the Order of Reason). Over the next three centuries, they began searching for this place. Actually, they found the kingdom rather easily, but the war lasted 300 years. In the meantime, Void Seekers sent back a constant stream of messages claiming that no sign of Prester John could be found. Eventually, Sleepers abandoned the myth. At this point, the last remnant existed only in the Umbra. In 1592, a Verbena spirit-walker found Summer Grove; though his name has been forgotten, his story of being led there by a dark goddess has not.

- **Autumn Circle:** The oldest of the Seasonal Realms, Autumn Circle was a druidic sanctuary in Celtic Britain. Then the Romans came, saw, and conquered. Affronted by the Celts' practices and open defiance, the Romans began a systematic purge of the most powerful order of Celtic mystics: the druids. The last of their kind retreated to their oldest Node on the Isle of Man. When the Roman forces invaded in A. D. 61, the druids called upon their pagan gods for aid. Their prayers were answered: in exchange for every one of their lives, the Node was saved... by Lilith, presumably. Autumn Circle was rediscovered by the Welsh bard Myrddin in A.D. 575.

- **Talien, Technopagan at Large**

Listen. I've done a fair bit of traveling on both sides of the Gauntlet, and been to all four Seasonal Realms; I've devoted my life to learning Verbena lore; and it's my job as bard to relate the stuff I've learned. That's probably why Heasha recommended I write this section for Hastings' little "Pocket Guide to the Magiverse." It could also have something to do with the fact that most of this stuff was already on my hard drive and I could simply e-mail it to Hastings et al.

If you're looking for more info, check out my webpage at <http://www.tradition.com/talien>

- Talien

Places of Interest

Each Seasonal Realm boasts an infinite number of wonders. I've can only mention the most well-known here. Many living miracles abound in the Seasonal Realms, and only those who actually travel there are counted worthy to know the Realms' deepest secrets. In other words, nyah-nyah na nyah-nyah! :-P

Winter Castle

This Realm resembles an idealized alpine setting. Some of the graystone mountains are tall (20,000 feet) and jagged, like the highest peaks of East Africa. Others have the rounded contours of the Carpathians (8,000 feet). Still others are mere nunatak-strewn plateaus, like those of Greenland or Central Asia, barely rising above the 4,000-foot snowline. All are capped with crystalline snow and ringed in gossamer cloud. The air here is chill and scentless.

The only warmth in the Realm lies in the dark evergreen forests, in the insulated layer between prickly pine boughs and the carpet of needles, shielded from the whistling wind and swirling snow. Yet those who have sheltered here claim that the forest is filled with "dark and secret things," and that the smell of earth, sap and rot forcibly remind them that some life is more ancient than man....

Yet the Realm is not all peak and pine. Many other wonders lie hidden amid the valleys. One such site is the Caldwell ("Cold Wall") glacier, its crystalline face covered with stylized sculptures of mythic beasts and other, more natural forms. By comparing today's designs with a sketch from 139 years ago, it seems that the carved relief has been altered over time. No one knows whether some patient hand carves these slow and subtle changes, or if the crawling ice shapes itself.

Supposedly, there exists somewhere a place where the cliffs crack into fjords before falling away into an icy sea. Who knows what lifeforms dwell in these chilly waters, or what land (if any) lies beyond them....

Finally, I should mention the site which gives this Realm its name — Winter Castle. The foundation of this elegant medieval palace is carved from one of the graystone mountains; its walls consist of stone blocks, each layer a paler gray than the one beneath, lightening as they rise until they meet ivory parapets. Protective runes have been chiseled into many of the blocks. Set above a sheer cliff, only skilled climbers or those capable of flight can access the main portcullis. Other welcome guests are shown in through a hidden postern gate at valley-level. Permanently "garrisoned" by Guardians of the Tree, the Castle provides shelter for any Verbena visiting this Realm. In the palace's covered courtyard stands an old oak, its bark blood-red. Empty nooses hang from the bare branches, and a tangle of spears lies upon the loamy earth amid its roots.

To some visitors, this cold-hearted Realm seems to hunger for life. It numbs the senses, saps strength from limbs, slows the blood, and catches your breath in crystal frost as soon as it escapes your throat. More optimistic Verbena interpret these same phenomenon as reminders of the preciousness of existence. Winter, too, is a part of the Eternal Year.

Spring Cottage

Visitors enter this Realm through the orchard. Row upon row of cherry trees there resemble the hands of bagladies -- brown and weathered, split and seeping, outstretched and awaiting handouts. Ugly as they are, the trees bear the most beautiful pink blossoms. The orchard is alive with them, drifting through the air in lazy streamers. Now you might imagine maids-in-waiting throwing petals before the skipping feet of newlyweds. The scent of spring — of damp earth and sap and fertile pollen — hangs thick in the air. Too sicklysweet, I'd hazard, for any travelers save the Verbena.

The orchard gives way to a stand of thicker trees; willows and crabapple, mostly. A garden walkway winds through a sodden yard. The cold flagstone slabs are splotched red from trampled apples and slick with fallen apple blossoms. The occasional sunshower sends sheets of rain pattering through the branches. Off to the side, a stream babbles. Only the most perceptive visitors notice the well — ancient and crumbling, overgrown with moss and weeds. Most mistake it for a natural formation. To those who peer inside, or who drop a stone or light-source into it, the well seems bottomless. When I first visited this Realm, my guide pulled me away, gently but insistently. "Best leave that alone, Talien," she urged. "Or you might find answers to questions you don't dare ask."

Beyond the well lies the focus of the Realm — a quaint little cottage set amid a wonderful garden. The dew-dappled foliage includes tall purple tulips rising from dark green swaths; crocuses of many colors; yellow trumpet-shaped daffodils; yellow-flowered forsythia bushes; and gray-tufted pussywillows. You can hear wind-chimes tinkling and smell woodsmoke. The Spring Cottage itself, roughly 30 feet by 60 feet, is constructed of shaved timber beams, notched together at the corners. Age has split the weathered-gray wood, yet the cracks between the beams have been freshly filled with clay,

Inside, the Cottage is decorated with a scythe, a yoke, brass plates, and other antiques. Lanterns and wall-scones send light dancing about the cozy little rooms. The living room, kitchen and dining room are components of one large open space (roughly half the Cottage), separated by a creative arrangement of furniture. Three bedrooms and a porch complete the layout. The place smells of herbs and potpourri. Considering the amount of brass and wood, I sometimes wonder if Verbena are actually rustic cousins of Ethermages.

Spring Cottage isn't always this quiet. Though nobody lives here full-time, many Verbena gather during Imbolc and Candlemas (February 1 and 2). Other times, the Moon-seeket "caretakers" hold frequent parties. No "time-share" arrangements exist. It's pretty much first come, first serve. When the place is packed, you simply mingle as best you can, and crash wherever you like. When I visited, my guide and I had the place to ourselves. She read my fortune by the light of a thick wax candle. We made love by the fire.

Most first-time visitors ask about the World Tree: all Verbena Chantries are supposed to have one, right? These folks are taken out back and shown a waist-high oak. "This sapling," goes the traditional explanation, "represents the seeds of myth yet remaining on Earth, slowly taking root under our guidance. They will grow, and eventually bear fruit of their own...."

Summer Grove

Two rows of standing stones flank the dusty path into this Realm. The shrill buzz of elusive "heat bugs" and the distant hint of maniacal laughter carry well through the still, dry air. A traveler's tread kicks up mosquitoes, black flies and sand fleas.

The trail leads into a vast grove of sacred oaks. At the center stands one of the largest World Trees ever seen. Five humans could stand arm in arm and still not encompass its girth. Tradition holds that it's the adopted form of a Pure One in age-old slumber. For most spirit-walkers, this is the limit of their exploration: the one trail in, the grove, the same trail out. Every instinct warns you that in the rest of the Realm, human laws no longer apply.

One mystick I know claims to have explored beyond the Grove itself. A shape-changer, Kamaria was operating almost entirely by instinct at the time, which is perhaps why she was allowed to return home. It also means her memories are vague flashes, mostly impressions of scent and sound. Apparently, the oak grove becomes a forest of beech, walnut, chestnut, apple, and even cherry trees. Eventually, the trees begin to thin; the distance between branches grow so great she had to run among the roots. Much further on, the land became savanna: scattered trees; termite mounds buzzing with activity; searing open sky; very little shelter. In a depression in the savanna lay a watering hole with powerful impressions. All manners of creatures — mundane and mythic, predator and prey — come there to drink. Kamaria sensed no fear, but some very strong auras.

It seemed to her that she caught the scent of endless desert beyond. But even Kamaria was afraid to investigate further.

Autumn Circle

The portal to this Realm is formed by the trunks, twining roots and interlocking branches of any two trees that ring the crest of a hill. Within this circle exists a large clearing, pounded flat by eons of dance. In the center squats



a flat stone altar, shaped like a ring. From its center grows the Realm's World Tree. Its leaves — and those of the surrounding trees — are shot through with brilliant colors, rather than the usual oak brown.

By the light of cracking fires held aloft in cast-iron braziers, one notices that the altar has had many years of use. Layers and layers of symbols are chiseled into its smooth-worn surface. The most ancient marks are hardly discernible, but seem to be swastikas, spirals and other ancient symbols we no longer recognize. Deeper, newer inscriptions are in Ogham, Gaelic and Latin. Rust-red coloring helps to bring them out.

Beyond the ring of trees, and the dancing firelight within, the Realm gleams dimly as if under the light of a full moon: a silver-blue land leached of color, every detail accentuated by deep, stark shadows rather than highlights. Strangely, though, no silver disk hangs in the wrinkled, blue-velvet sky. Except for the crunch of twigs underfoot or the rustle of blown leaves, an uncanny silence reigns. One can explore beyond the ring of trees; not every opening is a mystick portal. The sacred circle lies upon a hill. Below it stretches a mossy greensward covered in toadstools. Some seers have gained great insight by eating the fungi. Others have retched for hours.

The surrounding land consists of soggy, mist-shrouded downs. Some explorers have stumbled upon a thick, thorny hedge-maze. One possible path through the labyrinth leads to a set of narrow stone steps, a rickety dock and a small pool. Its water is as clear as sheet glass and its cold, clear depths go down forever. Beyond the yellow-orange sand of the shallows, the center drops away between a few interlocking roots into blue nothingness. Some say this way leads to other worlds. No one has yet tested this theory.

Ecology

May you be whole, Earth, mother of men;

May you prosper under God's protection,

Food filled for the profit of men.

— Part of an Anglo-Saxon "field-remedy" charm

Each Seasonal Realm, predictably, has its own ecosystem, rules and inhabitants. Needless to say, anyone caught messing with the natural order, leaving trash, or other "civilized" pastimes is dealt with harshly, especially if he's a Verbena (we're supposed to know better). Making a mess in the Seasonal Realms is tantamount to shitting in the Goddess' face. Just don't do it,

- **Winter Castle:** Trees range from pine-and-birch forests in the valleys, to stands of giant loblolly on the slopes, their pillarlike branches decorated with lichen tresses. In the highest altitudes, only mosses and tussock grass grow. Scattered amid this greenery are a few flowering plants, such as northern monkshood, great valerian and winter rose.

In the circle of life, plants nourish voles, hares, seed-eating woodpeckers, red squirrels, caribou, mammoth and woolly rhinoceros. In turn, herbivores feed the Arctic foxes, giant eagles, wolves and wolverines, mountain bears and cold drakes. In the frozen seas, rumor claims, a pod of blue whales thrives. If this is true, then some Verbena have been doing for modern endangered species what we once did for mythic beasts.

Besides mundane creatures, Winter Castle supports a host of mystick fauna. The Dragon lord Viouvre supposedly still resides somewhere in the Realm. Instead of scales, his hide is said to be covered with semi-precious stones, such as amethyst, aquamarine, white sapphire, and all shades of quartz. Some say that the elusive fur-clad "Lapps" who roam the frozen wastes are not men at all, but Yeti or even Troll fae. The only spirits who care to visit are ice elementals.

The caretakers of this Realm are mostly Guardians of the Tree, hards and druids by vocation. They can be found exploring the snow-bound land on skis or huddled around a firepit in Winter Castle, sharing mugs of warm mead or rum-and-coffee and exchanging lore. At Winter Solstice (December 21 or 22), a cross-section of all Verbena gather here to welcome new members to the Tradition. Though the land is harsh, capable hunters survive quite nicely on the native game. (That said, bringing down a woolly rhinoceros is still quite challenging, even for a half-dozen hunters. Magick is considered cheating.) Creative recipes based on lichen, roots or tree-bark help to supplement a primarily protein diet. The most popular retreat is Winter Castle itself. Anyone who can get inside is welcome to find a corner and light a fire. Just be respectful, that's all, or else! In a pinch, though, a wanderer can construct her own shelter with whatever materials are at hand — an igloo keeps the chill wind out just as well as any castle!

- **Spring Cottage:** Fauna include wood duck, grouse, rabbit, raccoon, porcupine, deer, ferret, lynx, and black bear. For these creatures, life is a rapid and eternal cycle of mating, bearing and raising young, and mating again. Besides mundane animals, some visitors claim to have seen nymphs and satyrs frolicking in the orchard.

The Verbena caretakers are mostly Moon-Seekers. During Imbolc and Candlemas (February 1 and 2), many different Verbena gather at Spring Cottage to celebrate re-awakenings.

- **Summer Grove:** For those who care to notice, the typical vegetation is predominantly red oat grass. The trees that dot the savanna include cedar and 30-foot-tall branching cacti.

This Realm harbors warthog, buffalo, elephants, vultures, a phoenix, lions, a mated pair of griffins, and sinuous, multilegged crocodiles. Herds of jentink's duiker (a little deerlike animal, virtually extinct on Earth), and a pack of thylacines (marsupial Tasmanian "wolves") also roam the grasslands. This Realm's fauna is particularly notable in that even the mundane animals are spiritually aware; when

threatened by mystick assault, they fall into a trance and allow their animal spirits to defend them. Similarly, every tree is inhabited by a Glade Child spirir.

The caretakers of this Realm are exclusively Lifeweavers. Those who can change shape spend most of their time in animal form; the Realm's inhabitants do not care much for the scent of humans. Mages must bring down prey with only natural weaponry. Everyone who has dared to carry a rifle -- or even a bow -- into the wilderness has either disappeared or been found horribly mauled. Your other option is to bring a pack lunch (but don't ask what happens to those who litter...). During Beltain (April 30), many Verbena crowd into Summer Grove; few stray far from the World Tree. One year, hundreds of beasts ringed the grove, silent witnesses to the celebration. Nobody knows why, though a popular rumor holds that the child born of that year's union between Young Lord and Maiden will turn out to be very special.

- **Autumn Circle:** Strangely for a Verbena Realm, Autumn Circle appears to be almost devoid of animal life... unless you count the occasional set of green eyes that watch from a distance. One mage claims to have seen a unicorn, ash-gray instead of white, with a horn of solid jet. Then again, he had eaten quite a few mushrooms.

This Realm's Verbena caretakers, mostly Twisters of Fate, go about in ominous hooded robes. The sickles they bear have been used for more than just gathering holly berries....During Lammas (August 1 or 2), many Verbena converge here to Awaken the Avatars of their apprentices and initiate them into our Tradition. No mage lives here permanently. The caretakers come and go as need arises.

One more time, for the dense of skull: If you enter the Realm, be respectful. If you kill, do so cleanly. If you make a mess, take it out with you. If you ignore these rules, pray. In the Seasonal Realms, Mother Nature can be quite unforgiving.





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Chapter Five: Celestial Bodies

First of all, we must note that the universe is spherical. The reason is either that of all forms, the sphere is the most perfect, needing no joint and being a complete unit; or that it is the most capacious of figures, best suited to enclose and retain all things; or even that all the separate parts of the universe, I mean the sun, moon, planets, and stars, are seen to be this shape; or that wholes strive to be circumscribed by this boundary, as is apparent in drops of water and other fluid bodies of water when they seek to be contained.

— Nicolaus Copernicus, *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*

The Fisher Princess Speaks



I thought opening with a quote from Copernicus would get the attention of certain hidebound individuals who feel as though this man — who was nearly burned as a witch for his revelations — was a traitor to his kind. While I concede that his ideas helped the Order of Reason accelerate their hold on the Earthly paradigm, I must also concede that he had a point.

Copernicus was right, of course. Whether we speak of planets, cycles, societies or elements of magick, the sphere

always comes up. Despite the early myths of the flat Earth, I believe the concept of the spherical planet is as inevitable magickally as it seems "scientifically." And if, in observing a phenomena, he was limiting that phenomena, then this book is a similar act of hubris.

Ah, well. In this chapter, I speak of planets and the Realms which overlay them. Despite the "scientific" posturing which seems to limit these Shards into lifeless balls of gas and rock, we who have traveled there in person know that the truth is more complex than those pronouncements would have us believe.

Outside our own Horizon, off our Earth, Realms still await the brave and foolhardy explorer. The closest Realms — Shade and Shard Realms — have ancient connections to our world and our kind. Ageless portals still lead to many of them. Old tales recount how the One splintered into Many; its larger fragments became Shard Realms, planets embodying elements of its new being. The smaller bits became spirits, forces and all living things. These tales, however one views them, give us a starting place when asking why the planets and the Spheres should be one.

Then there's deep space — the Deep Umbra, Etherspace, the Void. Some of Alexis' own Tradition compete in a crazed "Great Race" with the Technocracy to discover new Realms and colonize planets before their rivals do. Most of them end up as fodder for the Nephandi, Marauders and worse who exist in the Void. Maybe they deserve it. These "pioneers," in their race for glory, endanger that which they seek. Like naturalists trampling a flower to catch a butterfly, they destroy that which they cannot see in order to capture that which they can. Maybe space is best left to its native inhabitants. And some of those inhabitants can insure that they are left alone.

Space Travel

Theoretically, it has always been possible to travel into space or the Deep Umbra. Legends tell of Si Ch'in, the Sky Emperor who ascended to the stars in a chariot of gold, or of Elynne Dragonchilde, who crossed the heavens on a dragon's back. Stairways to the Moon and cloud cities are part and parcel of every culture's folklore, and I do not dispute their authenticity. According to elders among the Dreamspeakers and Verbena, timeliest paths lead through the various Realms to the river of the Horizon, and to the Shards we now call planets. It is a long journey, but an achievable one.

Most mages who attempt a trip beyond the Horizon, however, prefer the more "credible" technomagicks of the Void Engineers and Sons of Ether. These two factions, who began an extraterrestrial rivalry in the late 1800s, actually left the Earth behind in the early part of that century, before either group had assumed its present form. Over the last 150 years, this exploration has reached into the next Solar System, uncloaking secrets that might be best left undisturbed. For, although most tales claim the Nephandi and Marauders began their existence on Earth, their kind seem most comfortable in the Void.

Magick in space has no limits. Whatever you will assumes form there without Paradox interfering. As explorers search for new sources of Quintessence and other raw materials or lifeforms, the so-called "Great Race" grows more deadly. The appeal of a trip into the Deep Umbra is certainly understandable. Just, for God's sake, be careful!

Consensual Space

One of the great mysteries of celestial bodies is the concept of consensual space. After all, anyone with a modern education "knows" that every planet in our System is a lifeless rock. Yet mages have populated these "rocks" for centuries, and they continue to walk among Realms which are, in essence, the Umbrae of those same Shards. How is this possible?

As we know, when the majority of people (or at least, of beings with will), believe in something, that something comes into being. When many people believe that a place is a certain way, it becomes that way. When the nature of that place differs from the new beliefs about it, a separation occurs. Our own world's Gauntlet shows what happens during this separation.

I use the term *consensual space* to define the belief the majority holds. Or more precisely, to define what most people choose to see. We walk in the consensual space of our world. The Otherworlds lie outside that space, still existing but separate from the mortal world. Many planets are the same way; "science" or some other folklore describes them one way, our travels there tell us things are different. Thus, while the Shard Realm of Life occupies Venus, a space probe landing on the planet itself would record something very different. Whether it does so because the probe's creators expected a dead world, or because the rest of us have been *told* to expect a dead world is open for debate. Either way, the thing is done and the Realms are separate. This is the Technocracy's legacy and its goal: to replace lands of wonder by convincing us they do not exist.

Shard and Shade Realms

*Heaven is our heritage,
Earth but a player's stage;
Mount we unto the sky.*

- Thomas Nashe, *A Litany in the Time of Plague*

Fragments, or Shard Realms

Lord Gilmore said it simplest in the Introduction — the Shard Realms are the Sun, the nine planets and Luna.

These are all large, solid, well-defined Realms, and most are easy to travel to by magickal or "scientific" means. Though the official consensus descriptions are not entirely true, you can rely on them to be fairly accurate about the physical characteristics of the planets. Because of this, I skip over things like magnitude, mass, atbedo and diameter. Where day, year, weather, temperature or gravity are interesting or necessary, or differ from the "official" versions, I give them. Every orbital characteristic is omitted — most means of travel ignore them entirely, some

paradigms defy the notion of planetary motion, and those few Tradition mages who need this information need it in far greater detail than can be given here.

Tales abound about the Celestines who "rule" the Shard Realms. One story even recounts the capture of the god of Jupiter during a war in the city of Chicago. I make no claims either way on this subject; if there are gods on the various planets, I do not care to anger them by revealing their secrets. If there are not, then I have not closed the possibility of their existence by saying so.

Shadows, or Shade Realms

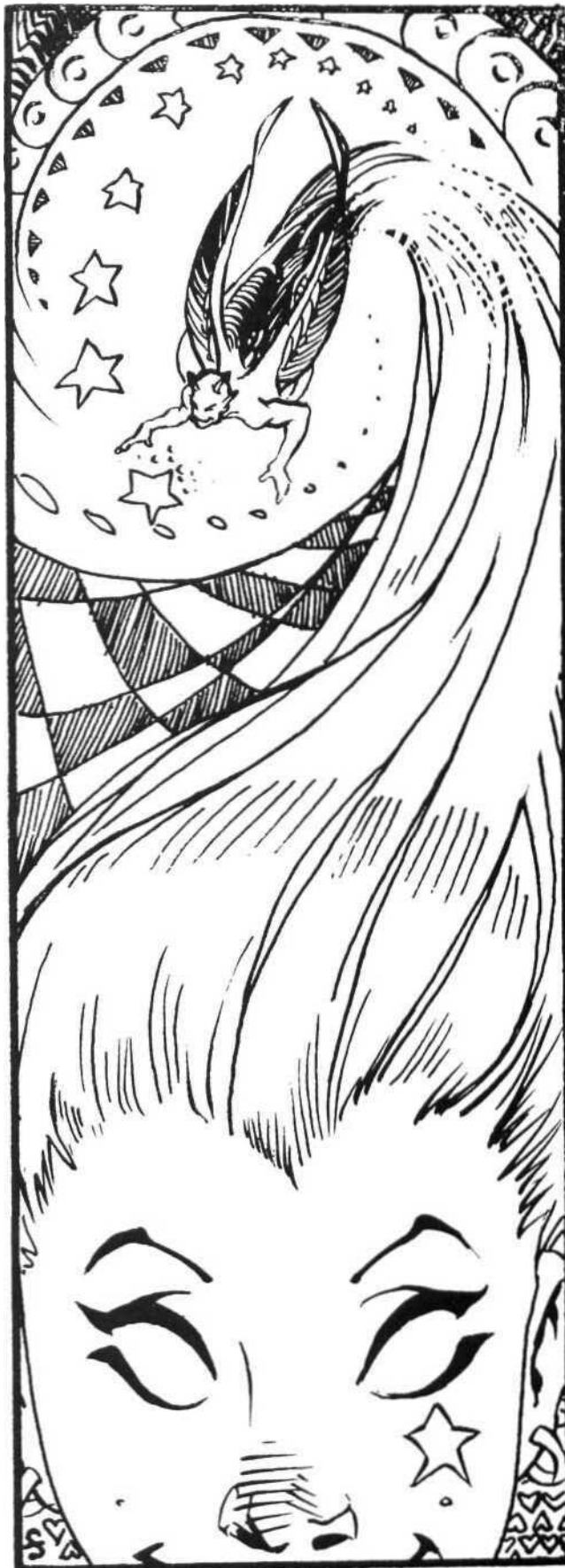
These are slightly harder to explain. The most commonly used metaphor is that the Shade Realms are the shadows cast on the Horizon by the Shard Realms. This is a completely useless description. The only thing it explains is the location of their "entrances"—drifting areas of space in the vicinity of the Horizon. These areas act as portals to the Shade Realms, but because of their enormous size, they are often confused for the Shade Realms themselves. (The smallest reported was slightly larger than a football field. By comparison, an evacuation or freight portal opened by normal means is rarely larger than a house.) Their appearances vary. The entry to the Shade Realm of Forces, for example, may manifest as a huge electrical storm, a sea of plasma or an invisible, rolling plain.

Most serious travelers think of the Shade Realms as completely separate universes, "parallel" to our own, in which a different Sphere is paramount. By this theory, we live in the Shade Realm of the 10th Sphere (the Infinite, Ether, Dharma or whatever). The substance of this Sphere surrounds everything; there is nowhere in this universe that it is Not. Little areas of the other Spheres speckle it—planets, suns, humans, spirits, etc. When we pass into the Shade Realm of Matter, we find that it is an entire universe of solid matter, speckled with hollow spaces of Prime, Life, Forces and the rest, roughly where our planets would be. The same holds true for the other Shades. The dominant Sphere makes up most of the Realm.

Where we *know* anything about a Shade Realm, I have included it. Unfortunately, certain Realms are difficult to visit, to understand, or to return from. I have omitted idle speculation except for the most interesting. This leaves several unavoidable gaps in the "travel guide," for which I do not apologize.

- A Note on Terminology

There is a definite and demonstrable connection between the Shade Realms and the planets. Because of this linkage, when the *Mercurian Cosmology* was written, Hermetic mages stopped calling the planets by their common names and began to refer to them as "the Shard Realms of" whatever Sphere was associated with their Shade Realm. Mars, connected by several portals to the Shade Realm of Forces, is often referred to as the Shard Realm of Forces. Modern theorists have abandoned this habit; it makes debate on the subject even wordier than usual for the Order, and is incomplete.



Shard Realms

Sol

Mercury

Venus

Earth, Luna

Mars

Jupiter

Saturn

Uranus (or Neptune)

Neptune (or Uranus)

Pluto

Shade Realms (S.R.)

Infinite

Correspondence

Life

Prime

Forces

Matter

Time

Spirit

Mind

Entropy

The Cosmology was written before the Europeans had realized that Pluto, Uranus and Neptune existed. While Pluto is undeniably the Shard Realm of Entropy, to this day no one has conclusively proved which of the other two is Mind, and which is Spirit. Because the Shard Realm term has been dropped by nearly everyone *except* my hidebound father and Nicodemus Mulhouse, the standard is to refer to the Shard Realms by their planetary names and to the Shade Realms as S.R. and the name of their Sphere, thus, "S.R. Forces" means "the Shade Realm of Forces."

Because certain groups of heavenly bodies are too attached to each other to deal with separately, I will deal with them together. Porthos would prefer me to stay strictly on format, but I do not feel the universe will mind.

The Sun and Mercury



The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,

The higher he's a-geiting.

The sooner will his race be run,

And nearer he's to setting,

— Robert Herrick, "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time"

To understand the sun, and why we know so little of it, you must know the history of Mercury and its moon.

Long ago in their study of Correspondence, the Batini found their way to Mercury and slowed its spin. They transported villages and farmland to the new world, and built a base from which to study the Shade Realm of Correspondence. Known as the City of Brass (in Arabic legend the kingdom of unholy people who shunned the teachings of the Koran), the Chantry rivaled Doissetep in size, if never in power. It took its name from the odd effect the Sun's magick-altered light had on the appearance of the white limestone and plastered mud which made up most of the buildings.

The Realm is lost now, and all the portals to it are closed. The planet itself is uninhabitable. The *Record of Marcella Decia* is by far the best eyewitness account of the mystery surrounding the loss of the Chantry (and through it, Mercury), though as with Mohejeno-Daro and the Roanoke colony, we may never know the whole story. Decia, a Hermetic mage of the Fraternal Order of Tytalus and the twenty-second Chancellor (from 1831 to 1556) of the Fors Collegis Mercuris, was the leader of the university Chantry on Mus, Mercury's hidden moon, at the time of the disaster. The first except is from before her accession to the Chancellorship, and I provide it because of the excellent descriptions of the City of Brass in its Golden Age.

• **April 9, 1827:** *Saw today with my own eyes the famous Batini Chantry. Went with Cor and the others. Took some time to adjust ta the yellow twilight, and to walking in a bowl. Cor says entire settlement built in the basin of a crater, on the edge of day.*

Disappointed in the beginning; looks like so many savage huts, primitive farms. Few real buildings of any size, and the floors of most of the sleeping quarters are dirt, not stone. Villagers friendly, though. Clean, polite, well-fed and proud. Took us to the town's center, where the mages live. Passed many empty archways, marker columns, circles set in the earth in stone. There were hundreds. Told me that every one was a portal to somewhere. Grog very casual about it, pointing out inscriptions and different stone colors to us, explaining parts of the coding.

Met the elders in the afternoon, still twilight. Much more impressed. Sat in courtyard of large Moorish building, something like the mosque on Mus, had strange coffee. Have been given formal permission to return, assigned escort, young man named Ali. Fell in love with their library, must learn Arabic. He seems willing to teach me.

• **August 13, 1844:** *... and hope that the situation settles down on Mercury. Elders very uneasy, watchful still, and growing more suspicious, I asked if any of my people were the cause, but they assure me the problem is internal. I feel a witch hunt in the wind. More, and more of my Batini staff are leaving, or being called to the planet.*

• **May 16, 1847:** *Ali came to Mus today, for the first time since the baby died. Should have known it would be bad news. Delivering message from the elders. They tell me they are betrayed, infiltrated. Not certain who is rotten, or for whom they work, but the elders say isolation is the only way to find out. Acting quickly. Will spend next week evacuating all those not suspected, calling back professors and students still under the shadow. Rough on my staff, difficult to house the grogs and consors on such short notice. Made the announcement, censored of course, at dinner. Grumbling, but we will do it. Only for a few weeks, regardless.*

• **June 1, 1847:** *...after the fight, sent for the few senior Batini we have. Asked them to speak to the villagers for me, and whether there was word yet. They agreed to keep the peace. No news.*

• **August 30, 1847:** *The Batini villagers are making good homes here.*

• **September 24, 1847:** *No word from Mercury. Astronomy department tells me the planet is beginning to rotate faster. I think I understand now.*

• **November 15, 1847:** *The end came today. The magicks that kept the planet habitable are gone, and the twilight zone has moved into daylight. This morning, through the telescope, we saw the fields and buildings burn. Tried to send scouting cabal to look for survivors, but there are no portals open, Shade Realm cut off as well. Doubt they would find anything; the library would never have been abandoned by the living. Have offered to adopt the apprentices as our own, and house the rest until they decide what to do.*

Sol and S.R. Infinite

In consensual space, the sun is a huge ball of gas in fission, fusion and the plasma state. To the Awakened, the sun appears the same, and is frustratingly unattainable. The Technocracy and Traditions know very little more than do Earthbound astronomers; although both the Void Engineers and the Sons of Ether send regular probes and close-passing ships, they are unable to study the star very closely. The Engineers are rumored to be building an extreme-approach vessel to fly through the photosphere, but even at this outer stratum the sun has a gravity 28 times Earth's and a temperature of 9000 °F. Even with technomagick of mythic proportions, the ship is likely to melt, implode or kill the crew very quickly. Obviously, traveling in the Technocratic paradigm has its disadvantages.

Awakened astronomers and cosmologists have been unable to find signs of a Gauntlet or Umbral landscape on the Sun. Many legends tell of a "Land of the Sun" and vast Realms associated with it, but if these are true, modern mages have lost the secret to finding the Shining Country. The most likely places to seek portals for it would have been Mercury and S.R. Correspondence, on which we offer more below.

Sol's "Shade Realm" affinity is one of the most hotly contested areas of cosmological research. While almost every theorist agrees that the Sun is the Shard Realm of the Infinite, the debate over what that infinite Sphere is rages incessantly. Each Tradition has their pet theory, and each Tradition wants to prove it. Before the fall of the College on Mus, the university Chantry was crawling with researchers from every sect seeking portals in the vicinity, or clues in the writings that survive from the Batini settlement.

However, if the idea of Shade Realms as universes dominated by one Sphere is true, we will never be able to study the 10th Sphere by traveling to its Shade Realm. We already live in it.

Ecology

Many spirits of fire, light and energy claim to have dwelled on the sun in their "youth." We assume that at least a few speak the truth, and that many Umbrood live there, but that few are able to survive outside their specialized environment.

Mercury

In consensual space, Mercury is a barren, airless, heavily cratered world with a slow rotation and no volcanic activity. It is the closest planet to the sun.

The day is roughly two thirds the length of the year, (59 and 88 Earth days, respectively) though this has not always been the case. Before the Batini Chantry was destroyed, Mercury's rotation took precisely the same time as its revolution. The planet kept one hemisphere always facing the sun, and one hemisphere in constant darkness. The Batini settlement was built in the twilight area between the two, where the climate was more bearable. Now no part of the planet escapes Mercury's incredible extremes of temperature: 700°F by day, -274°F by night.

Mercury has only one moon, Mus. This tiny satellite is unknown to Sleepers because its defenses render it almost invisible.

Background

Mercury was once the home to the largest Umbral Batini Chantry. Since their Sphere was Correspondence, the Shade Realm of Correspondence was associated with Mercury.

It is no longer possible to travel to the Shade Realm of Correspondence, historically the richest and most varied nexus point for portal-style interrealm travel. If there ever were any gates to the Shade Realm of the Sun or the spirit lands fabled to exist inside it, they have been closed with magicks the Virtual Adepts have not yet rediscovered.

Mercury remains the best physical base from which to study the sun itself, but the barriers prevent even physical approaches to the planet. Even the Technocracy realizes this, and NASA has been discouraged from building a lander. Mariner 10, the only probe thus far, was an orbiter only.

For over a century, the Traditions have been trying to reconnect to Mercury and S.R. Correspondence. These attempts are spearheaded by the Order of Hermes, working until recently (see below) from their base on Mus, and the Virtual Adepts, working from the Digital Web. The two groups have learned a great deal about portal magicks and Correspondence, but have made no tangible progress so far.

Ecology

Unknown. No reports of any indigenous fauna or flora, but mages and their consors once imported pets, chickens and meat animals, beasts of burden, food crops, flowers, shade trees, and (accidentally) rats, mice and flies. It is unlikely, however, that the oases created by the Batini still exist.

S.R. Correspondence

According to our sources, the Shade Realm is a very disturbing place, difficult to navigate in and nearly impossible to perceive accurately. Our universe has one nonspatial dimensions and three spatial ones. In S.R. Correspondence, there at least five spatial dimensions and two others.



Before the Realm was closed off, its entryway on the Horizon appeared as a huge, flat plane with its broad side always to the viewer. No matter how many observers examined it, none could find an edge or any indication of volume. When they approached the portal, those mages with any understanding of Correspondence magicks could decide to "slide" along it and enter the Realm, or to pass through it to the other side. The entryway seemed to have no thickness whatsoever.

Mus

Mus, a small, flat, rocky satellite only 40 miles across in its least dimension, and barely 154 miles in its greatest, cannot be seen from Earth, or by conventional astronomical instruments.

The surface is rough, barren and airless except for the area enclosed by the shield wall and buildings of the College. These are the only structures on the little moon. Their architecture is (or was) rather odd — very heavy medieval and Romanesque buildings combined with lighter, more Moorish structures. Imagine southern Spain crossed with northern Germany. The complex covers roughly five square miles and (before 1995) included a mosque, two chapels, the Great Hall of Reason, the third-best library of the Order of Hermes, and the usual dormitories and other offices. A small village and farming area was set aside for consors, the College's guards and retainers, and the families of the faculty.

Background

In the earliest days of the Council, the Order of Hermes and the Batini were still allies, tied more closely together than any other Traditions. The Batini invited the Order to build a university on Mus to which both could send their students. Because the Nephandi and the Craftmasons were interested even then in Mercury and the Sun, and because the Ascension War was yet young, the College was built as a fortress as well. It was designed to be the keystone of the planet's outer defenses.

Unfortunately for the school, the stonemason who built and sculpted the original door lintels for the Library, the Great Hall and the Main Gate, was nearly illiterate. Instructed to carve "ARX COLLEGIS MERCURIS" — the Fortress College of Mercury — he wrote down the instructions in his native language. Later, realizing that the mages wished to have the words in Latin, he took it upon himself to translate the name. What he carved in the end was "FORS COLLEGIS MERCURIS" — "the Accidental College of Mercury." The name stuck.

The College has been the site of many important events in Council history. It was here that the *Mercurian Cosmology* was developed, it was the hase for the Circle of Seven, and of course it became the home of those Batini innocent of the betrayal on Mercury. Marcella Decia was said to know the secret of reversing the blocks the Batini placed on their portals, but if so, she took her knowledge to the grave.

After the Second World War and the fall of the Batini, the Order of Hermes did their best to help the shattered remnants of the Tradition. They schooled the remaining students, took in huge numbers of refugees, equipped search parties and assisted the Errants. The College lost many good mages in the effort, mainly to Batini *barabbi*, but their loyalty never wavered.

In August, 1995, the Chantry on Mus was attacked by a fleet of small Technocratic tighter ships accompanied by a Qui La Machina carrying ground ships and infantry. The Order of Hermes mobilized their forces and managed to push the invaders back, but as the battle began to turn, both sides were assaulted by a third force: savage shock troops, a swarm of strange Umbrood, half-a-dozen wonnlike creatures, and a bevy of Nephandi sorcerers. The Technocratic forces withdrew with heavy losses, rejecting Chancellor Lord Gilmore's plea for co-operation, and the Nephandi took the College in an overwhelming wave. Gilmore and a handful of students, mages and consors escaped to Horizon via a last-ditch portal opened in the floor of the Library. To guard their retreat, the three surviving Batini instructors, resident on Mus since the College's founding, remained to destroy the entire building.

The College, as a body, still exists. Refugees of the massacre have found asylum on Cerberus, Pluto's second moon. Lord Gilmore has asked us to make this known, and to keep a mailbox open for other survivors who may have been separated from the main group. We are also taking a collection for their assistance. (Contact Alexis at her Web address for more information, or write to Doissetep Press.)

Today the Fortress on Mus is held by the Nephandi, and the Traditions lack the forces to take it. Scouts report that the battlements have been rebuilt, stronger than before. Perhaps the Technocracy will mount another expedition soon. I hope so. Make of that what you will. I'd rather see this important outpost occupied by our least enemies, rather than by our worst.

Ecology

Mus has no native life, but inside the walls of the College there was a fairly normal settlement mix of plants and animals. With the Nephandi in residence, the very ground now crawls with dangerous Umbrood and warped animals. Anything goes.

Venus and Mars



Mars and Venus have what no other Realms outside the Horizon do: Penumbrae. These "memories" of both planets show clearly that Earth is not the only source of life in the Solar System. We are merely the only life left.

Both worlds are unique in location, as well. Technically considered "outside" the Horizon, Mars and Venus are nonetheless easier to reach than the Horizon itself. Their proximity to Earth, particularly in the case of Venus, makes their Shade Realms and Penumbras interact all year round, creating permanent overlap zones.

Venus

Green, how much I want you green,

green wind, green branches...

The long wind was leaving

in the mouth a strange taste

of gall, mint, and sweet-basil.

— Federico Garcia Lorca, "Somnambule Ballad"

Often referred to as Earth's twin, Venus is roughly the same size as our home planet. Explorers for whom gravity is an issue will be comfortable, weighing about 90% of what they would on Earth. No moons. The planet rotates from east to west (the opposite of Earth's rotation).

Unfortunately, the physical aspect of Venus is almost completely uninhabitable. The atmosphere is corrosive,

the air pressure 90 times that of Earth and the temperature far too high (900°F) due to the greenhouse effect of that mammoth atmosphere. At various times, the Technocracy and the Council have sponsored outposts and small research stations, but even with magick and Primium, Venus is simply too hostile.

Venus does have a Penumbra. The Gauntlet seems to be the same for the entire planet, and the crossing is so difficult that it is easier to leave the physical aspect completely and enter the Penumbra from space or S.R. Life than it is to cross directly.

Until the 1960s, mundane scientists thought Venus was a watery planet something like Earth during the Coal Forest period. In science fiction and popular myth, storytellers populated it with ferns, horsetail plants, mosses, molds, fungi, lizards, and dinosaur-type animals.

In the Penumbra, Venus is still a watery planet something like Earth during the Coal Forest period. There are two continents, Ishtar Terra and Aphrodite Terra, and a mini-continent, Beta Regio. These are covered with swampy lowlands and jungle highlands, and dotted with active volcanoes. The rest of the planet is one huge, salt-marsh ocean of no great depth.

Why a Penumbra here? The theory is that the planet was once exactly as it appears to the spirit world. In the beginnings of the Solar System (or soon after the division of the One into Shard Realms), the sun burned much cooler than it does today. At those temperatures, Venus could have developed along the

same path that Earthly life followed later. If you are a die-hard evolutionary and this seems unlikely, remember that spirits and the Celestines have intervened many times with our own world, and probably modified our sister-world, too.

Conventional maps of the planet are good enough to navigate by, provided you make the climate and sea level adjustments in your head or by computer. The astronomers who mapped Venus by radar assigned names to the geological features, temporarily enraging the Verbena (who regard the planet with a fierce maternal affection). But the astronomers had already decided (*apparently* of their own accord) to name every feature (except the Maxwell mountains) after a woman or goddess, and the terms are now used almost universally, though not without grumbling.

Despite the planet's pleasant, habitable guise, be careful here. I will deal with the lively dangers below, but watch out even for the land itself. Those volcanoes, particularly Rhea Mons, erupt frequently and spew large clouds of poison gas. The Penumbra quickly "forgets" the poison, but the process can take several weeks. Try not to get caught in it.

Background

As the nearest, easiest Shard Realm to travel to, Venus has a long history of visitors and conflicts. All Nine Traditions and most of the other Awakened sects come to our sister planet for one reason or another.

Between Venus and the S.R. Life, there are four overlap zones. The zones are referred to as the four Verbena Seasonal Realms. (See Chapter Four for more information.)

Ecology

Imagine a rain forest. Cross it with a greenhouse. Multiply by 10, and add small dinosaurs. That is the Bygone Venus.

Watch out for mold spores and mildew. Keep moving, or things will grow on you and your equipment. Bring rain protection and breathing masks, or make sure you have someone in your party who can disinfect you magically every few hours or so. Don't sleep on the ground if you can help it, and certainly not without that Life specialist around.

Watch out for the bollixes, too, Venus is blessed (or plagued) with a vast number of this semi-intelligent species of Bygone. Whether or not they are dangerous depends on your point of view, but you should never take your eyes off them,

S.R. Life

In its most stable areas, the Shade Realm of Life looks and feels like a perfect version of any ecology you care to name, and a few known nowhere else in the Tellurian. There are deserts, jungles, temperate forests, grasslands and tundra, and even the most exotic climate exists here. Deeper in, one finds gas-giant ecologies and even stranger things.

Travelers get into trouble easily in S.R. Life. Not only are there poisonous plants, dangerous animals and nasty insects, but the Realm itself is constantly in flux.

Suppose Alexis, for instance, were to walk a few miles into Life, blazing a trail with spray paint or cloth strips (knowing that the worst thing she could do when surrounded by Life-loving spirits would be to hurt anything), then sit down for a picnic. A few hours later, she packs up and tries to walk back out. The territory she returns through *may* have the same geography as before, but the flora, fauna and climate will be very different. Wherever Alexis is, the environment seems to grow at normal speed, but outside that ecosystem, time seems to rush by. Those blazed trees are coal by now. Fortunately, Alexis read this book, knows exactly where she wants to go and has at least a basic knowledge of Correspondence (I assume).

Time is not truly affected by the Realm, or perhaps vice versa. Living things simply grow and change faster here. Again, evolutionaries will have to cope with the "impossible."

The Horizon entry way to S.R. Life looks like a large tract of wilderness. Occasionally, it may be linked to some remote location on Earth, such as the Amazonian rainforests, uninhabited mountain valleys, or the African or Asian jungles.

Ecology

Which ones would you like? They all exist here. Bygones are more common in S.R. Life than anywhere else, and Marauders frequent it. Be careful not to tangle with them.

Researchers can detect no pattern in the climate shifts. Jungles sit next to deserts that butt up against oceans. Animals stay in their own habitats, never crossing into regions they aren't designed to cope with. No one knows what happens to them during the sped-up evolutions.

Mars

In 1877, the first really detailed map of Mars was published, made by G.V. Schiaparelli. It updated the nomenclature, classified a fair number of the geological features and added something strange: dark lines which Schiaparelli called *canali*. These channels, or canals, were thought to be artificial waterways. Percival Lowell agreed with him, and hypothesized artificial waterways built by a sentient Martian race. The canals were later "proved" not to exist, and the "dying civilization" theory was abandoned. Unfortunately for science, the theory was right.

How exactly Schiaparelli and Lowell, both Sleepers, saw the ruins of the canals — through the Gauntlet, across a million miles of space, and through a mundane telescope — we may never know, but the map is a fairly accurate depiction of the spirit structures built by the Martians. The canals run along natural Ley lines, and the Martian cities were built at the Nodes at their junctions.

In its physical aspect, Mars is a smallish ball of rusty red rock, completely lifeless. Though there is water, it exists only in the rock itself and in combination with carbon dioxide in the polar ice caps. The atmosphere is too thin to breathe, even for the Technocracy's genetically engineered

servants. (Etherbreathers will have no difficulty.) Mars has two moons, and many active volcanoes. The Viking landers have crushed mundane science's hopes of ever finding sophisticated life on this planet.

In its Penumbra, Mars is much more interesting. Here, Schiaparelli's canals do exist, and two Tradition settlements grace the landscape at the junction of seven such canals, the Trivium Charontis.

The main colony, of course, is the terraformed grounds of Doissetep. The farms, the village, and many of the teaching buildings are located on Mars proper, in the Penumbra, Doissetep itself lies in a permanent overlap zone, the one caused by the interaction of the Shade Realm of Forces and the Martian Penumbra.

The second colony is also within the terraformed region. Officially titled Marsbase One, (affectionately nicknamed "Bradbury") the settlement is only temporary. The Sons of Ether established their camp with the permission of the Deacons in summer of 1996. The digs themselves are outside the habitable zone, by necessity (see below).

The Martian day is only 37 minutes longer than Earth's, but its year takes 668 of those days. Doissetep and Bradbury run on local time for daily activities, but keep their records by Greenwich Mean Time. The local "weather" is erratic. Mars is subject to fierce winds, which occasionally cause dust storms that cover the entire planet for weeks. Doissetep is partially protected from the storms, but visitors are still advised that the Realm is tempestuous on the best of days.

For navigational purposes, a Schiaparelli map with modernized nomenclature is best. *Paradigma* publishes an excellent version.

Background

Mars is home of the largest, oldest, most decrepit Tradition Chantry of them all. When evacuating Doissetep's Earthly manifestation during the dawn of the Ascension War, the Chantry's masters sought the most powerful of Mars' Nodes (still very weak, compared to Earth's magical centers) to place it on. When the Order of Hermes moved Doissetep to Mars, and from Mars to their "invincible" position between Realms, they landed the castle, the mountain and the grounds smack on top of the central part of the ruined city. The magicks that melded the imported soil to the native srrata destroyed the best part of the ruins entirely. The Sons' dig is in the only remaining "neighborhood" of the city. Even should the Deacons renew the archeologists' lease, the Sons will have to move on when the area is exhausted.

The Sons and their Dreamspeaker allies are doing their best to fight the red tape, however. The Dreamspeakers, normally apolitical, have only recently moved in on the debate. Their interest here seems to be tied to the lifestyle of the Martians; any race so perfectly balanced in the Periphery must have known more than a few things about the Spirit ways.

Ecology

Normal for an Umbral Chantry: pigs, cattle, humans, rats, etc. Food crops are the main plant life. Unlike Venus, there are no Bygones on Mars. Cosmologists theorize that any spirit life present would be too likely to stumble into the uninhabitable physical aspect to survive.

Unofficially, the Sons have begun to wonder. No one from the expedition was willing to be quoted here, but "ghost stories" of apparitions resembling the TriCha A and C figures are common among the junior members of the team. The folklore of the villagers, long discounted as peasant superstitions and anoxia hallucinations, is finally being taken seriously. With so much of Mars unexplored even now, no one is willing to bet we won't see Bygones before the end of the century,

Deimos and Phobos

Neither of the moons of Mars is very big; both are airless and the two seem to be captured asteroids rather than original companions. Deimos, the outer moon, is currently unoccupied. Doissetep foiled a rather half-hearted attempt by the Void Engineers to take it in 1978.

Phobos' orbit is very small; the little world (only 17 miles long) literally zooms around Mars, rising and setting more than twice a day. Its largest crater, Stickney, is six miles wide. The whole moon looks like a potato with a big hollow bite taken out of one end. This "bite" houses a small fortress, Eris, ostensibly commanded by the Glass Eye cabal. In the absence of the Glass Eye, the Society of the Case-Hardened Soul has taken on duties there. Eris is Doissetep's first line of defense against intruders, and the Society sees it as an excellent military base for their war against Iteration X.

S.R. Forces

Much like the inside of a star, or the center of a lightning rod, but easier to live in. I recommend staying away from it until you have at least a basic grasp of the Forces Sphere. Even with protective gear and magicks, this is a dangerous Realm,

There are calm areas within S.R. Forces. "Flat" areas, force bubbles and strange plateaus spring up out of the raw energy without warning, and disappear just as fast. Take advantage of them while they last; inside one, it becomes far easier to speak with the local spirits. A favorite Son of Ether trick is to prepare a container ahead of time and persuade an energy spirit (a fusion elemental, for example) to leave the Realm and see the universe. The spirit gets to travel without dispersing, the Son gets a spaceship-level power source, and everybody's happy. It is important to *keep* the spirit happy, however.

The entryway on the Horizon appears most often as a huge electrical storm, but as I mentioned before, the opening's appearance varies. There are reports of dazzling clouds of red light that led to S.R. Forces, but these are infrequent and questionable.

The Earth and Luna



I rather like the world. The flesh is pleasing and the Devil does not trouble me.

—Elbert Hubbard

The Earth is flat. The Earth is a sphere. The Earth is a goddess, sleeping restlessly. The Earth is the center of the universe, and the Earth orbits the sun. All these are true.

I absolutely refuse to describe the Earth further in this format.

I will, however, take this opportunity to explain a few things about navigation, and why you should never start learning real worldwalking inside the Horizon.

Earlier, we mentioned that when Shade Realms overlap each other or interact with Penumbrae and Shard Realms, they create a new Realm called an overlap zone. Inside the Horizon, there are the Earth, the Moon, one Lunar Penumbra and three Gaian Penumbrae (one in each of the Three Worlds), Arcadia and the three Great Enigmas. That's 10 worlds, all large and close enough to affect each other year-round. The Traditions have been trying to identify every Realm within the Horizon since the earliest days of the Council, and the tally is still growing. We have no space to list even the names of the permanent Realms, let alone the thousands of conjunction overlap zones.

It is all very complicated. Most of these areas have their own sections in this hook — pay particular attention to the Shadowlands, or Penumbra of Earth in the Dark Umbra,

which is covered in Chapter Three. Most research sources skip over it, but for your safety, my father insisted it be covered. Just don't go there.

For beginning worldwalkers, I recommend leaving the Earth and all this confusion behind as soon as possible. Learn the basics in the High or Middle Penumbrae if you want, and then get to the Horizon. The best teachers are out here. The universe is simpler, and even though the Ascension War is all around you, at least the fight is out where you can see it and there are fewer civilians in the way.

Luna

The true twin to Earth is not Venus, but the Moon. Everything that happens there affects our homeworld, and every change on Gaia is reflected in her sister. Even consensual science reflects this: By their definition, the Moon—the only moon that needs no name, the moon which created the very *idea* of moon—is no moon at all, but a world in its own right, the other half of our double-planet system.

Certainly the two worlds enjoy a very unusual relationship. Many cosmologists believe that the Earth and Luna together form the Shard Realm of Prime, not one or the other. They seek to prove it by finding S.R. Prime and mapping the portals from it to each world, but so far with no success. The entryway on the Horizon has never been found, giving rise to the question—can a Shard Realm cast a shadow on the Horizon from the *inside*?

The Triple Moon

The triple nature of the Moon confuses cosmologists and travelers alike. By all accounts, the place has three aspects — the lifeless rock the Void Engineers have "conquered"; that same planet's dying Umbral shadow, orbited by Victoria Station; and the vibrant Court of Luna. How can one Realm have three aspects?

For the answer to that, we need look no further than our own Earth. Would all the countless Otherworlds disappear if, by some obscene stroke of luck, the Earth were to perish? Most cosmologists say no. The material aspect of the world could be destroyed, but its surrounding shadows would survive, at least temporarily. During the lag time between Earth's annihilation and the death of the Umbrae, beings with the means to do so would set up new homes, perhaps in the orbit of their former worlds, perhaps elsewhere. Maybe Luna decided to do the same when hostile ants in metal ships came calling on her Realm. After swatting a few (see the early history of Darkside Moonbase, Chapter Four), she decided simply to move and leave a barren husk for the ants to play with.

This same theory may explain why a few Umbral travelers encounter vast spirit worlds governed by demigods (see Chapter Two), while most others enter the equally vast but independent Shade Realms described in this chapter. Maybe the gods don't like to be bothered.

Maybe it's also vain to think that the reasons for these triple aspects have anything to do with us whatsoever. Perhaps it's just one of creation's truths. Cosmologists point to the various mystic trinities — Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Triple Goddess, Mind, Body and Soul, etc. — and suppose that *each* planet has three aspects. We simply know more about the aspects of our closest neighbor than we do about the outlying planets. And consider that, for all the journeying the "walker" mysticks might do, most accounts of other planets come from Technomancers; as loath as Alexis might be admit it, the Sons of Ether have their own blinders when it comes to admitting the "Scientific" proof of hidden gods.

Perhaps there are certain things they were simply not meant to see.

The chief rival theory on the Shade Realm problem claims that S.R. Prime (wherever it may be) is associated only with the Earth, and that Arcadia (see below) is the "Shade" of the Moon. Though not popular with the Order of Hermes, this theory does explain the immense legendary geographic extent of the Fae Realm — provided always that the Shade Realms are the separate "universes" of modern cosmology. I prefer to consider Arcadia an Enigma; the Fae would likely rather it not be classified at all.

The physical aspect of the Moon is exactly as the Consensus portrays it — an airless, barren, cratered, lava-encrusted world. Only a Technocratic station and a few of their sentinel satellites break the dead monotony. Unfortunately, the Moon may be like this *because* the Consensus portrays it that way. Enough evidence of life remains to convince many angry Dreamspeakers that the Technocracy has won the battle here already.

The Penumbra seems but little different. Most of the surface is the same barren, cratered wasteland. In the shadows of the craters, however, the Moon shows a different character. Here are the remains of forests, the ruins of villages (and at least one city) built in a strongly Egyptian style. In the Penumbra, too, you may meet other travelers — the fae themselves, various strange wercreatures, other mages and many spirits. I have heard tales that a spirit manifestation of the Moon, called Phoebe or Luna, sits on the other side of the Gauntlet instead. Her Realm, a gigantic sphere of pure moonsilver, swarms with Lune spirits and rejects all who would despoil Her. If these tales are true, there may be a third Moon hiding from the Technocratic presence on the planetoid's surface. I do not know the truth, and I prefer not to speculate on the ways of shapeshifters.

It is important to note that even Ether breathers will need life support equipment on the mundane side of the Gauntlet. Perhaps this is a side effect of Dark Side Moon Base (Chapter Four) and its eerie history,

Background

The Moon has always been a gathering-place for Verbena and Dreamspeakers (who revere her), and most other Traditions (merely respecting her) travel here for their own reasons. The Garou revere Luna as a goddess, and their myths attribute many of their talents to Her. Cats are said to walk to Luna on moonbeams, and the Triple Goddess of elder cultures is often pictured as the phases of the Moon. Many Paths and well-worn tracks through the Umbra lead here. The early Council should have guessed that these would be the first ways off-planet that the Order of Reason would find.

Darkside Moonbase has changed the whole character of the Moon. Once fairly friendly to visitors, the Moon now is hostile, and the fae, Garou and other weres have become even more protective and belligerent than before. Be careful, and try to avoid contact, particularly with anything that looks catlike. Never disturb any ruins, cairns or artifacts you find.



Ecology

Nothing lives on the barren surface of the physical Moon except a few Void Engineers. The Penumbra shows signs of old forests, and scraps of seaweed in the Mares suggest old oceans. There is very little life left, and all of it stays in the shelter of crater walls. From time to time, especially during what we on Earth see as the Gibbous and Full phases of the Moon, weird creatures can be seen dancing across Luna's surface. The Technocrats, I'm told, get very edgy during such events.

Arcadia

I include this Realm in this section only because it is certainly located inside the Horizon, I cannot say whether it truly is associated with the Moon or not; make your own judgments.

• From an anonymous Web posting: *Put off your plans for visiting Faerieland, you tree-hugging New Age dabblers. No portals, freaks. No teleporting in — that Correspondence shit only goes if you've already been where you're going, or you know -exactly- where it is, right? No Paths lead there, and all the old gates are CLOSED. C-L-O-S-E-D. Titania's pulled in her washing and Oberon's barred the door.*

Come on, why the hell do you think they'd want you tracking mud and Technocrats in behind you? If we can get there, the Conventions can get there! I'm asking you, as a personal favor, to -stop posting- to this damn board. What if you come up with something that works? Or you give the Techies a -really- good idea? Oops! Goddamn dead faeries, enslaved faeries, Nephandi-corrupted faeries.

FIX THIS WORLD FIRST!

We cannot find it. That is all I know.

Asteroids and the Horizon



Asteroids are large rocks in space. Mount Everest torn from its roots and set in orbit would be a medium-sized asteroid. Most move around the sun in a wide Belt between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter (in the scientific paradigm, anyway). There are a few closer in than Earth, a few farther out than Jupiter, and a few in clusters ahead of and behind Jupiter in its orbit. Mundane scientists have charted over 5,000 asteroids, and low-security Void Engineer files hold orbital data on at least 3,000 more. The Technocracy and Sons of Ether each maintain fueling stations on various medium-sized rocks, but there are no large settlements or Channies.

I have few facts to give you on these tiny Realms, but theories we have in plenty.

First, the Lost Planet: Early astronomers and cosmologists asked themselves "Where did all these rocks come from?" The answer they preferred was that a long, long time ago, there had been another planet between Mars and Jupiter. For some unknown reason, the planet exploded. From the debris came the asteroids, the two moons of Mars, and many of the gas giants' smaller satellites. Consensual and mystick astronomers are now finding organic material in the Belt; therefore if there had been a planet, it might have had life on it. This is unlikely, but interesting.

Second, stemming from the first: What Sphere could the Lost Planet (assuming there was one) have been associated with? Is there evidence in the asteroids of a Sphere that no longer exists? Or, on the Horizon, could we find the entryway of a forgotten Shade Realm? A few armchair cosmologists and theologians are working on the first half of the problem, and a few suicidal explorers on the Horizon search for the second.

Third, more cosmology: Are the Asteroids and the Horizon two parts of the same structure? Odd as the first two concepts were, this hypothesis is the most debatable. The only basis for the connection is a slight accident of position (the Asteroids separate the "inner" planets from the "outer" planets; the Horizon separates the Near Umbra from the Deep Umbra), and of composition (the Asteroid Belt is a wide region dotted with small Realms; the Horizon is a wide region dotted with small Realms). No one has established a connection, though Ceres and Horizon (the Realm, not the region) are said to be the same world seen different ways. Shangri-La and Vesta are another famous pair. Since none of the "obvious" connections are willing to permit the Realm-shaking experiments needed to prove or disprove the point, the matter remains in limbo and no serious cosmologist will touch it.

The Horizon

As we know, the Horizon is the dividing "line" between the Near Umbra and the Deep Umbra. The Three Worlds become one as you cross it, and Realspace becomes indistinguishable from Etherspace beyond it.

Though frequently referred to as a barrier — largely because that is exactly what the Technocracy would like to make it — the Horizon is not too difficult to cross, I cannot tell you what it will look like to your eyes, but I myself see a wide and shallow river. To me, the Horizon Realms are boats and islands in the river and along the shores. Many people see nothing, but do know when they have crossed it, and most Ethernauts of my acquaintance see a diffuse band of dust and light. Either way, the magicks required to pass through are powerful on a mortal scale but minor on a cosmic one.

This area of space is heavily patrolled by the Void Engineers, and they maintain several defensive satellites "between" Luna and the Horizon. Be careful here, particularly when traveling toward the Earth — the systems are designed primarily to keep intruders out, not to track ships and walkers on their way to deeper space.

Anchorheads

Swirling gates of energy mark the places where the Horizon gives way to the Deep Umbra. These gates, called Anchorheads, appear and disappear at random, sometimes sweeping unlucky travelers out of the Near Worlds and hurtling them into space. Occasionally, Anchorheads manifest in Realms, but more often they appear along Moon Paths or on the edges of the Horizon. Some Anchorheads, rippling with the energies of the places they lead to, reach from Shenti (see "Space") and connect inside the Horizon, creating a direct passageway to these enigmatic Realms. I do not advise following their lure.

Anchorheads seem to be more prevalent inside the Horizon than outside. Although these vortices do appear from time to time in open space, the "barrier" seems stronger from without than from within. Many Anchorheads link the Horizon with Shade Realms or the mysterious Shenti, and bridge incredible distances in a matter of moments.

Travel through an Anchorhead is a frightening affair. As the worldwalker enters the whirling vortex, her body shudders as crackling energies seek to pull her apart. No magick works inside an Anchorhead — the traveler is there for the duration. As the whirling clouds disperse, the explorer finds herself at the other end of the wormhole. Her reception depends upon where she has landed.

Air and Ether

Sam: *So let me get this straight. We can breathe here then?*

Max: *I guess those candy-butt astronauts didn't have the stones to try it.*

Sam: *I could never say that about an astronaut.*

— Steve Purcell, *Sam and Max; Bad Day on the Moon*

Once past the Horizon, explorers fall into two categories — people who can breathe and people who can't.

Technocrats can't. Not only do they think that space is airless, they believe it so strongly that a Technocrat kicked out of an airlock dies. A Technocrat who lives is not a Technocrat anymore. Recruit her.

Most Tradition mages and Umbral natives can breathe "space." Dreamspeakers in particular rarely understand the problem mundanely educated explorers face. Ether-breathing requires some expertise, but most people without it don't make it far enough to find out.

The trick of it is to know that you can. Step outside and take off your airtank, but keep it close by. This may be something which you will not get right the first time. It helps to find a person who breathes Ether and watch them. Believe what you see, and try some more. It is simple, and it is not magick, or consors could not do it. It is our best advantage past the Horizon.

Even so, long trips into deep space require some sort of life-support system, magical or otherwise. Like a traveler in the wilderness, your survival depends on more than simply breathing. Cut off without any Earthly link, any traveler will die in time.

Jupiter and Saturn



These two I take together, not because of their similar physical compositions, but because on their moons, the Ascension War rages more fiercely than anywhere else in the Tellurian.

Earth is an enormous, deadly battleground, but the combat there is kept quiet. The Horizon, hotly contested itself, is composed of artificial Realms too fragile for all-out war and hazardous obstacles like Shade Realm gateways. The moons of Jupiter and Saturn are large, stable and solid enough for massive fortresses and heavy assaults. There are no Enigmas in the area, and no Sleepers or civilians to hide from or to shield the enemy.

In the strange complexes that surround these planets, dozens of Awakened mages and hundreds of acolytes (often bolstered by Otherworldly allies) battle from technomagickal strongholds. This war began early this century, accelerated during the Second World War (when the Nephandi were

driven from Earth in large numbers), and continues like a living chess game. The warriors here are isolated from Earth and seem to like it that way. My father speculates that they have found some massive source of Quintessence on one or both of the planets. This fortune, if it exists, could tip the balance of the War on Earth, and so both the Council and the Technocrats send people and supplies through portals in the moon complexes. Then again, the whole war may be a ruse for a handful of demented mages who want to play Flash Gordon, I don't know.

To give you more detail on the complicated interplay of power here, I went not to the mages, but to a real expert, Jedediah "Rambling Jed" Barnes has been a consor of the Sons of Ether since WWII, and has lived on one of these moons or another for almost 70 years.

• *From a letter written January 4, 1996: ...and of course I'll help out with your book, girl, I'm just not sure exactly how far back you want me to go — do these folks need history, or current events? Hell, I'll just try to get the idea across. By the*

time this thing comes out Callisto may have changed hands again, and the whole story would take two of your books.

Jupiter

The largest planet in the Solar System, Jupiter is roughly a thousandth the size of the sun. At the "surface," this planet has a gravity two and a half times that of Earth. Though the world's composition is complex and stratified, Jupiter is best thought of as a huge ball of cold gas swirling over a core of hot, solid aas with no real surface or dividing line between them. The atmosphere is famous for its enormous hurricanelike storms, of which the Red Spot is the best known.

Be careful in the open space around Jupiter; the planet's magnetic field interacts with the solar wind to create very dangerous radiation. Worldwalkers will not have a problem (there are clear routes visible through the poisoned areas), but space-paradigm travelers need to monitor their instruments carefully or use extra shielding.

Background

There's really not a heck of a lot of activity going on down there right now. We [the Sons of Ether] have a few sensor stations and an off-and-on manned outpost, and [the Technocracy] has an experimental gas-mining station that we know about and they know we know about.

Jupiter is just too big to know much about.

Ecology

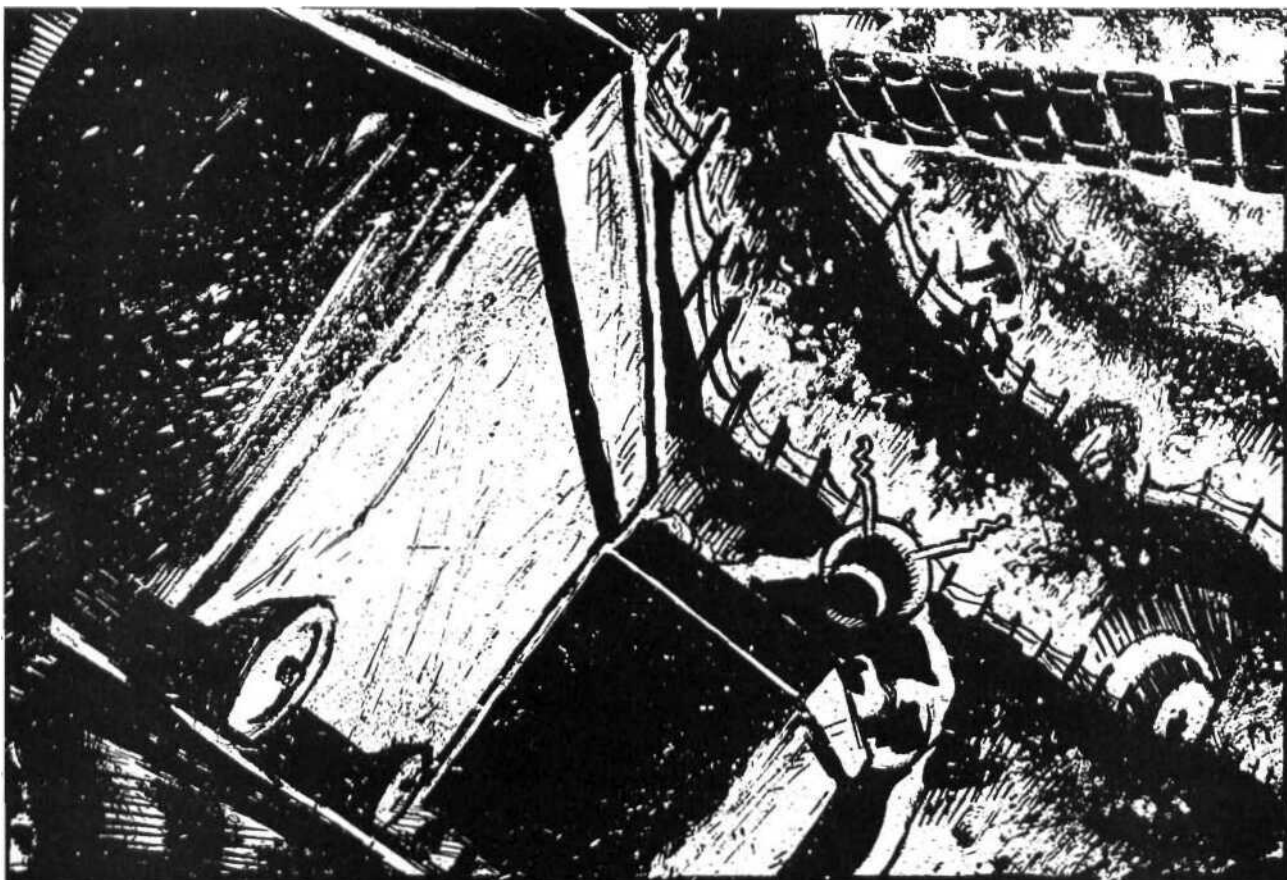
Well, so far as I know there's nothing down there but the Technocrats and Mitch and Eliza Beth [in the manned pod]. 'Liza went on last time about how she'd seen a damn big, blip zoom past on the scanner, and how it just couldn't have been a Techie ship — but nobody believes her. I wouldn't credit it myself, but I know Jupiter. It's so damn big that anything could be there, and we wouldn't know it unless we hit the right cloud level, at the right time, with the right kind of scanner.

So maybe.

Moons

The moons of Jupiter fall into three categories: large worlds of rock and various kinds of ice (Ganymede, Callisto and Europa), smaller rock-worlds and Io, Ganymede is the largest moon in the Solar System.

Io's crust is nearly entirely sulfur and sulfurous compounds. The Realm's many volcanoes erupt sulfur, and an eruption's always occurring somewhere. Io is the most seismically active world known. Its orbit lies in Jupiter's radiation belt, and because of this, an unprotected human on Io is dead within hours. Io shares an unusual, powerful magnetic bond with Jupiter in scientific terms; mage cosmologists fear that there may be strong mystic bonds connecting the two as well.



Portals are very easily opened between moons and the Horizon, between various Jovian moons, between these moons and Saturn's, and between Saturn's various moons. The smaller the Realms, the less difficulty in establishing the link. This is one of the reasons for the constant territorial battles — a fortress needs heavy warding or Primium defenses to keep gates from being opened under the defenders.

All right, hold on, it's a long damn list.

The biggies first, what you'd call the Gallilean moons 'cause he was the first Sleeper to find them. Right now, everything is nice and balanced -- the Traditions hold Ganymede, the Technocracy's got Europa, the Marauders have Callisto, and the Nephandi are camped out on Io.

But to show you the kind of thing that goes on out here: About two years ago, the Marauders tried to establish a beach-head on Europa. They managed to take the lesser Techie base and bring in reinforcements. The Technocracy lost about five of the little moons when it brought in enough troops to defend the main European base. So the Nephandi took two of those, and we grabbed the other three. Then we used some of the ships we had acquired that way to try a sneak attack on the Technocracy's main base. It didn't work, but the Nephandi got another moon from us while we were busy, and then retreated to Io again, leaving all their moons undefended. The Marauders tried to take these, and after they had two of them the Nephandi attacked Callisto in force, driving every last Marauder off the planetoid. At this point, the Marauders had a base on Europa and seven little moons, but didn't control a Gallilean. Two months later, they took back Callisto (we figure they had portals the Nephandi never found) and abandoned the European base. The Technocracy moved back in, discovered that the base was just too booby-trapped to live in, and started work on a new fortress for that hemisphere — which brings us up to now. That's just two years, kids. Think about it.

Amalthea is the biggest non-Gallilean, and it's a Technocracy world. You've heard of Metropolis 2? It's on Amalthea. It practically is Amalthea. Metropolis 2 gets hit a lot, but the Techies' defenses there are better than anything but their main base on Europa.

Himalia is a pretty decent size, and last time I checked we still had it. There's a small garrison there of Order of Hermes folks who like to keep an eye on Metropolis; I think they're originally from Doissetep. We keep our own people there, and a few other Traditions, mostly Akashic and Verbena fighting mages, stay too. The fortifications are pretty bleak though; the Verbena don't hang around long. Most of those girls like it better on Ganymede, where things are a little greener and permanent.

Everything else is real small, and changes hands too often to count. In the same group with Amalthea, there's Thebe, Metis andAdrastea. In the same group with Himalia, there's Elara, Leda and Lysithea. Farther out, there's Phasiphae, Ananke, Carme and Sinope. There's six or seven more tiny ones (some artificial) but they don't matter.

Settlements out here are strong and portable. Most of the little moons' bases are really just damn big ships docked in the rock, so when the bad guys are about to take over the crew can lift off and make it to their home Gallilean.

S.R. Matter

Most people are already familiar with S.R. Matter by another name; this is the universe of the Hollow Earth. Long thought to be an Enigma, the Hollow Earth now seems to be a "pocket-Realm" inside S.R. Matter. The Shade Realm itself seems to mirror our universe — where we have vast, interplanetary space, it has vast, interplanetary solid. Science and alchemy have long struggled to analyze the substance of Matter, but have not succeeded in determining its exact composition. The substance breaks down to topsoil and Earth-type crust materials in the vicinity of the pocket-Realms.

There are thought to be as many Hollow Worlds in S.R. Matter as there are Shard Realms here, but only the Hollow Earth and Hollow Mercury have been discovered.

The Hollow Mercury was not recognized as such until the pocket-Realm theory came along; the *Mercurian Cosmology* considered it an Enigma, and since the loss of the City of Brass, no further research has been possible. Cosmologists explained the Hollow Earth 20 or 30 different ways; the Realm was once thought to be the "fading" remnant of an old part of the Earth itself. The connection between them was ignored until a comparison of the two phenomena at a cosmology conference conducted last year by Dr. William Bridges (Son of Ether).

Now the hunt is on for a third Hollow World to confirm the theory. *Paradigma*-sponsored scouting parties leave (or have already left) this year for the polar regions of Venus, Luna, Mars, Saturn, Neptune and Uranus. For more information, contact *Paradigma's* website.

Saturn

Saturn's a damn sight easier to deal with. That's where most of four [Sons of Ether] mining goes on, and the Conventions have at least three cloud stations themselves. Less gravity, less radiation, less hassle. And it's gorgeous; Saturn, the rings and moons together are about the prettiest thing in whole damn System, aside from Earth.

This Realm's composition is much like Jupiter's, but on a smaller scale. The weather patterns are also similar. Saturn has more large moons than its neighbor (nine instead of six), and many smaller satellites (nine of which NASA has discovered). The enormous ring system is the world's most famous feature and the sight should not be missed.

Background

Let's see here... the mining stations have been there, one way or another, for at least 60 years. Not much to say, except to warn folks about a few rumors.

What we're hearing out here is that one of the Technocracy's bases, poking its nose into a storm center, found a portal going somewhere strange. A little vague, sure, but God only knows how the information is getting from there to my bar stool. What we're absolutely sure of is that there are a lot of Techie troops going through Tethys down to the planet and not coming back. There's definitely no new settlement, so the question everybody here wants answered is: Are these scout teams sent to check out dangerous territory, or are these shock troops sent into [S.R.] Time to fight somewhere in the future? Could really ruin your day, seven divisions of Techie troops popping up where you don't want them....

Ecology

No indigenous life known.

Moons

What we've got here are nine biggish balls of rock and ice. There are a bunch of pebbles floating around, but they're not important.

Titan is the second-largest satellite in the Solar System. This strange Realm has a methane atmosphere, methane oceans and a methane-ice-covered crust. Because planets with water-vapor in their atmosphere, water oceans, and water-ice in their crusts have a habit of developing life, some consider that "triple-point" planets — with one substance in three states — may produce life, no matter what the substance is. It is a thin theory, but strengthened by the fact that Titan is heavily defended by a spirit of at least Incarna-level powers. There are also faint signs that may indicate a Titanian Penumbra. The Dreamspeakers are trying to communicate with the guardian, but either the spirit doesn't talk or the Dreamspeakers won't.

So Titan's off limits. I'll let you handle that, it's all hocus-pocus to an old man like me. Everything else is just the normal squabbles.

Hyperion and Phoebe are ours [the Traditions'], and both of 'em are pretty little ports. We've had a long time to reinforce the settlements, and I don't think we'll lose them any time soon. Mimas is different; the whole place is just a staging area for scout ships, experimental weapons, suicidal Errants and deranged explorers. It's mostly Ether Kids like young Alexis, old Virtual Adepts who've decided to get physical, and weirdoes from other Traditions. There're even a few Hollow Ones hanging out there — and to show you just how young the crowd is, the whole Realm's been nicknamed the Death Star 'cause it's gray and has a huge crater that looks like the main cannon array from the movie.

Tethys and Rhea belong to the Techies, heart and soul. Tethys Station is an important port for them, and like I said, the troops really pour through there to Saturn and points

west. Rhea is cloaked pretty good, but we've figured out what they're up to — big shipyards cover most of the northern half of the Realm. I'm guessing this must be about their largest in-System dock and repair station, and maybe the largest construction dock. There's sure an awful lot of space-junk floating around Rhea.

Dione, Enceladus, and Iapetus have got Marauders crawling all over them. We try not to look too closely.

So far as we know, the Nephandi don't control any of the big moons out here. There's no lo-perfect real estate for them around Saturn. And while I doubt anybody'd admit to it, there's kind of a gentleman's agreement between us, the Techies, and the Mad Ones. Nobody wants the Nephantli getting in the way while we're fighting each other, so we take turns ousting them when they've had a little moon too long, I think right now they've got three of the pebbles, and they're about due to get kicked off two of them.

The NASA-named pebbles are Pan, Atlas, Prometheus, Pandora, Epimetheus, Janus, Telesto, Calypso and Helene. I know that a few escaped Voyager, and I'm pretty sure Shrimp, Ichiban, Corpus, and Roll Over all have the old names to them.

S.R.. Time

Probably the most dangerous Shade Realm of all. Even the most experienced mages get lost in it, and few explorers have ever returned to share their research. Cosmologists and Time Masters think they know what the difficulty is, but are helpless to prevent it.

The theory is this: Our home universe has three spatial dimensions, in which, with practice, we move freely. It has one time dimension, in which we can move in only one direction, usually at a constant and unalterable rate. Masters of Time can change only the rate, never the direction. Enter S.R. Time, and (according to the very few who come back) space feels normal, but *all* the dimensions are time. However you move, you are time traveling. If you stand still, you are time traveling. Few can understand how their seemingly spatial movement relates to the world outside. On return, a mage may discover that his three steps in and two to the right have sent him forward 20 years, and aged him 10, Alexis, for instance, goes in, takes the same five steps, and returns 5000 years later, younger than she went in. This effect, which some Cultists of Ecstasy call "the Blink of Brahma's Eyes," has yet to be surmounted, even by Masters of Time. The great Akrites Salonikas, among others, supposedly took a journey into S.R. Time as the last act of his career.

My advice is to avoid this Realm like the plague. Those who study the mysterious Zigg'raugglurr claim that this time-spanning race might have originated in S.R. Time, and no one wants to encounter more of those monstrosities.

Uranus and Neptune



Space flights are merely an escape, a fleeing away from oneself, because it is easier to go to Mars than it is to penetrate one's own being.

— Carl Jung

Saturn is the last busy planet; the next two are cold and dark, too far out for easy Horizon access and lacking any attractions worth traveling the length of the System for.

Their Shade Realms, however, are another story. Though no one has decided which is which, one of these planets "represents" Mind and the other, Spirit. If you, the reader, have been Awakened for any period of time, you have already traveled to these Realms without realizing it. Each of these formless universes expresses our deepest selves — our minds and souls. The reality we bring there is the reality inside our own beings. In short, these are the places we go for Seekings and Epiphanies. The trials we encounter here are those things which we must overcome to progress on Earth.

Uranus

Uranus appears as a huge, green gas giant. It and Neptune (twins in size and type) are cooler than the inner colossi, and of slightly different composition. Astronomers hold two main theories on Uranus' structure — the first (and more likely), that the cold, dense atmosphere covers a slush-ball kind of core; the second, that the atmosphere covers a water ocean, beneath which would be a silicate, rocky core. Neither has been confirmed by explorers; very few travel to this Realm.

Uranus is unusual for a gas giant; the Realm has no internal source of heat. The planet's oddest feature is that it "lies on its side." If you think of the Solar System in spatial terms, the equator of the sun and the equators of all the other planets lie more or less in the same plane. Uranus' equator is tilted 98° to that plane.

Moons

The names of the moons come from Shakespeare and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. Puck, Cordelia, Ophelia, Bianca, Cressida, Desdemona, Juliet, Portia, Rosalind and Belinda are "pebbles;" Miranda, Ariel, Umbriel, Titania and Oberon are world-sized Realms. The Akashic Brotherhood has a monastery, the Red-Wind-Forest-Home, on Miranda, and there are at least seven scattered outposts of other Traditions on the other sizable Realms. I heard two years ago about a cabal of Hollow Ones planning a trip to Ophelia and Juliet, but lost track of them afterwards. The smaller moons are largely unexplored — the Akashic monks are typical of settlers here in that they do not wish to bother or be bothered.



The Marauders hold Puck and Oberon, and no one seems to mind. The Technocracy has only one known facility in the area, a refueling station on Ariel. Nephandic movements around Uranus remain a mystery.

Neptune

Neptune appears as a huge, blue gas giant. The atmosphere is famous for high-velocity winds that blow west over the equator and east over the "temperate" zones. Neptune is a more lively world than its twin; its weather patterns resemble Jupiter's rather than Uranus,' and the Spots visible on the inner gas giants also manifest here.

Moons

Neptune has eight known moons: Naiad, Thalassa, Despina, Galatea, Larissa, Proteus, Triton and Nereid. Triton is the largest; the Technocracy's last in-System station sits on the Realm's North Pole. Only Naiad and Thalassa are "pebbles;" both are uninhabited. We know of four Tradition Chantries (two mixed, one Dreamspeaker, one Celestial Chorus) in the area, but because no one has yet checked NASA's findings against the features of these Realms, I cannot tell you which world houses which Chantry. I do not even know whether Voyager found the Chantry moons at all.

Background

If anything of significance has happened on either world, the facts have not been recorded.

Ecology

No life, aside from the Chantries based on the moons, is known to exist in either place.

S.R. Spirit

Travel to this Realm is outstandingly simple. S.R. Spirit has a wide, open entryway on the Horizon, often described as a "mirage of feeling." Vague, but accurate. Some travelers see what they expect the gate to look like — a massive palace gate seething with mist, or an outcrop of rock lit by inner sunlight. Most simply find a glade or thicket on the Horizon which appeals to them strangely — strong impressions of home and familiarity emanate from the area. Once you're inside, the mirage ends and the Realm's nature becomes apparent.

The landscape you enter depends entirely on the state of your own soul. Nephandi surround themselves with hellish vistas, Technocrats tend towards austere and mountainous terrain, and Tradition mages create a wide variety of scenery.

Still more disturbingly: When a mage crosses into S.R. Spirit, her Avatar takes on separate form. Any bound spirits escape their housings — fetishes included — and your Avatar exists as a separate entity. The Realm forces possessing entities out of their vessels, and here they show their true forms. Any

"liberated" spirit remains tied to its "subject" by a thin thread similar to the astral-traveler's silver cord. Breaking the thread frees the trapped spirit to roam on its own. Reuniting loosed spirits with their vessels is extraordinarily difficult.

Breaking an Avatar's thread leaves its mage soulless but alive. If the Avatar stays in the area, it can be reattached, but anyone who would cut a mage's cord will certainly try to destroy or kidnap the Avatar immediately afterward. If the soulless one leaves the Realm, she may never find her Avatar again — remember that Shade Realms are probably universes in their own right. A kidnapped Avatar is usually taken outside the Realm by the culprit. Be careful.

Why visit such a potentially dangerous world? For consors seeking Awakening, Dreamspeakers seeking knowledge, or any mage simply Seeking, this Realm — where face-to-face conversations with Avatars are possible — is sometimes the only hope.

S.R. Mind

Similar in many ways to S.R. Spirit, S.R. Mind changes its appearance based on the visitor's mental state rather than nature. Anger produces storms and earthquakes, contentment brings sunshine and cool breezes. The weather fluctuates quickly, but the landscape remains much the same throughout a visit.

S.R. Mind's entryway is a blue-white field of light, either vertical and walked through like a door, or horizontal and dropped into. Once a visitor arrives, she finds herself in a landscape which best reflects her mental state. A frightened Virtual Adept might end up in a Kafkaesque prison, while a calm Dreamspeaker walks her ancestral hills. If a number of worldwalkers enter the Realm at once, the landscape becomes a composite of their collective psyches — a very disconcerting thing, no matter how well you may *think* you know your cabal!

No traveler enters S.R. Mind or Spirit without some kind of test which must be overcome. Hence, the regions become unconscious staging grounds for the conflicts we face to Ascend. "Walking" travelers rarely face the kind of trials that mages on a formal Seeking do, but they may discover unpleasant things about their companions before they all leave the Realm. Every attempt to "barge in" through a group Seeking has ended in failure; from what I've heard, the true benefits of Seeking can only be learned alone.

This Realm is a grand tool for self-discovery. Because it reflects all the levels of the conscious and subconscious mind, a worldwalker can discover the cracks in her armor, the fallacies in her assumptions, and all the forgotten skeletons in her closet if she looks hard enough.

One very unsettling aspect to S.R. Mind remains: If the Shade Realms are truly parallel universes dominated by one Sphere, then chances are good that this entire universe is sentient, and that when you walk into it you are entering a single enormous mind. This is only a theory. However...

Running Landscapes

When characters enter S.R. Mind or S.R. Spirit, the environment adjusts to reflect them. In S.R. Mind, the landscape is determined by the character's Demeanor, in S.R. Spirit, her Nature is the important factor. You can custom-tailor your description to fit the character and the chronicle, but we've included suggestions below to get you started.

Because of the Storytelling difficulties inherent in running the composite landscape generated by six mages all walking in the same area, you may want to run Seekings (particularly in S.R. Spirit, where the Avatars become NPCs and need your direction) one at a time.

If you do decide to run composite landscapes, figure them out ahead of time. You need to decide whether the setting will represent the spirit or mindset of the group as a whole, or be a layering of all the character's Archetypes together. For instance, a Bon Vivant, a Conniver, a Survivor and a Critic form a scouting cabal, the Elephant's Children. When they're all together, they stand aloof from other cabals and mage society in general, making the cabal-as-a-whole's demeanor Loner. This would get them simple desert or forests from the suggested lists. Layered, they might find themselves in a cityscape with flashing neon and fancy casinos, surrounded by nasty urban streets — everything very lush and pleasant, but all the right angles off by a degree or two.

Normally, there are no inhabitants in any of the structures generated by the visitor's minds. Umbrood may show up in S.R. Spirit, but because there are no disguises, they can't become part of the scenery there unless they already belong. Few Umbrood frequent S.R. Mind.

Examples:

- **Architect:** Unformed cities, young orchards, ruins, empty foundations. Raw materials without form.
- **Avant Garde:** Empty plains, open tundra, rolling grasslands, fields of pure white snow.
- **Bon Vivant:** An endless round of *almost* exactly whatever the character enjoys most. If life's a beach...
- **Caregiver:** Farmland, gardens. More frequently, a war zone, ravaged lands, or hospital ward.
- **Conformist:** Suburbs. Home — wherever the character belongs, but with nothing quite in the right place.
- **Conniver:** Las Vegas-type cityscapes. Also forests.
- **Critic:** Any Earth-type environment, but with everything slightly skewed.
- **Curmudgeon:** The World of Darkness looking even worse. Murphy's law incarnate.
- **Deviant:** Glass houses to smash, signs to disobey. Tends to be rocky.
- **Director:** Pictures to straighten. Like the real world, but manageable with just a little more effort. Hilly.
- **Fanatic:** Lots of cliffs, gorges. Extremes of whatever terrain is most like home.
- **Jester:** Dull prairies, bleak seashores. This place needs a party.
- **Judge:** Lawless wilderness, or dark, siren-filled cityscapes.
- **Loner:** Desert or sparse forest, full of other people's footprints.
- **Martyr:** Cliffs, deserts. Empty cities, not merely unpopulated ones.
- **Rebel:** Hassle. Quicksand, thorns, mountains, roots tripping you up, walls blocking your path.
- **Survivor:** Tough but livable forest, Robinson Crusoe islands, prairie, urban jungle.
- **Traditionalist:** The good old days made manifest, including the first signs of whatever destroyed them back home. Hazy.
- **Visionary:** Ordinary Earthly lands. Clouds, dirt, water, woods — but with patterns and signs hidden for those who know how to look.

Pluto

I include Pluto here as the ninth planet and the Shard Realm of Entropy, but with reservations. I shall start by going into why roughly half of our leading cosmologists disagree with the classification.

Pluto was discovered (according to Sleeper history) by Clyde Tombaugh in 1930. Tombaugh was following calculations made by Percival Lowell (the same Sleeper who managed to see Umbral structures on the surface of Mars using a mundane telescope). Pluto was more or less where Lowell had predicted it would be.

Lowell based his calculations on eccentricities in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune — but Pluto by itself is not big enough to cause them. Pluto and both its moons together

aren't big enough, so either Lowell was very lucky, or there is more out there than even Awakened cosmologists are aware of: possibly the real ninth planet and true Shard Realm of Entropy, referred to in theory as Planet X, or Proserpina.

All this may sound like nonsense if you aren't a Son of Ether or an astronomically minded Orphan, but there are a lot of people who would like to explore the local system — Pluto itself, the scientifically known moon Charon and the "unknown" moon Cerberus. Unfortunately for cosmologists, the entire area has been effectively quarantined by Senex, the leader of the Euthanatos Chantry on Cerberus.



The one stable portal into the planetary system leads to the death-mages' school, and apparently no farther. Senex allows no traffic through, no use of the portal by exploration teams, and no scouting bases on Charon. A ship-based expedition might land on Charon or Pluto and search, but the attempt would be slow, obvious and possibly rude. The mages on Cerberus are capable of destroying Technocratic, Marauder, and Nephantic craft in the area, and often do so. No Tradition ships have been willing to press their luck.

No one has been able to find any other portals leading into the Pluto system, or discover a route from the Dark Umbra to S.R. Entropy (None that can be used, at least. Rumors hint that some portal runs from Pluto to the bottom of the so-called "Labyrinth", but no one living has made the trip). Cosmologists presume that there must be a portal from Cerberus to the other moon, at least, perhaps to Pluto, and maybe even to Planet X.

S.R. Entropy

We know very little about this Realm; until the Sphere-universe theory became popular, no one was looking for it. Not to say that the Realm has never been visited, but it is nearly impossible to confirm that a world last traveled to three centuries ago truly is the world you're looking for when there is nothing to guide you but ancient diaries and the memories of *very* old men.

Because of the quarantine, all travel to S.R. Entropy takes place on the Horizon. Very little of it has been successful or enthusiastic. The tendency to avoid any contact with Entropy is understandably strong, and until explorers with more experience in the Sphere are available, we won't know much.

Scouts sent through what is believed to be the Horizon entryway find themselves in what feels like a section of the Shadowlands and looks like the inside of a coal cellar at midnight. This gateway appears as a completely black and lightless area that occludes stars and objects that pass behind it.

Charon and Cerberus

Charon is a small, rocky ball of ice, and mundane science is probably correct in considering it a captured comet. Very little is known about this Realm; there are no known stable portals to or from it. The few gates which have been opened collapsed before the return of the scouts who were sent through.

Cerberus, slightly larger, is rocky and craterpocked. The surface conditions are desertlike, and surprisingly warm this far from the Sun. The Euthanatos Chantry is located on the equator, to take best advantage of the heat. Two main structures make up the settlement: The Gatehouse (the only edifice remaining from the first Chantry here), and a walled complex that houses the modern settlement. Made of dark red basalt, the ancient Gatehouse is notable for its labyrinth, intricate design, and heavy, subtle warding. The walled teaching colony was constructed in this century, and most of it is white sandstone. The Chantry seemed built for a much larger residency than it would ever house, but the spacious, quiet quarters and once-empty dormitories are full to overflowing now (see below).

Background

I skip over Charon completely here; Cerberus is the real center of interest in the system.

We have few details on the Chantry which preceded the current Euthanatos establishment. It was definitely much smaller; the two surviving cabals were both living in the same section of the Gatehouse when construction began on Senex's new complex. Rumor has it that the original occupants were also death-mages, but no confirmation is forthcoming. Since Senex took over at the turn of the century, Spring has returned to Cerberus. The population of teachers and students has grown steadily, if slowly, and the Chantry's influence is surprising for so small and distant a Realm.



Space is the stature of God.

— Joseph Joubert

This ends the tour of the Solar System, I can't take you much farther. After Pluto, the only things out there still tied to our sun are the rocky snowballs called the Oort Cloud by astronomers. The walking Traditions (mostly Dreamspeakers and Verbena) recognize them in different form, and I like their version better — these are the standing stones at the edge of the known world, and dimly lit however you see them.

Past that, we are only certain of one thing. Deep space is vast, lightless and alive. The Nephandi and their corrupt masters lie somewhere in the Void, perhaps in the Realm called Malfeas, perhaps in other places as well. Marauders seem to spawn in a place sometimes called the Flux, and beings without names prowl the void between worlds. Most of those who pass the Horizon never return. Remember that.

Although most walking explorers pass through portals in the different Realms, the occasional traveler finds she can indeed walk in space. How is this possible? Isn't space an airless vacuum, without gravity or surface? Well, yes and no. It is a desert of reality, a barren nothing dotted with islands of something. If you have the power and the will to bring your own pocket of something with you, you can shape that nothing to your needs. (See my notes under "Air and Ether.")

Most walkers fashion a path through space. Skill with the Correspondence, Mind or Spirit Spheres helps in this regard — the distances are still unimaginably vast. Generally, a traveler will need some form of ship if he wants to go far; walking in space can literally take lifetimes. Long-term survival requires powerful magicks; otherwise, the trip through nothing drains your very soul. The fact that Mad and Fallen exiles have survived outside our Horizon attests that vast reserves of Quintessence exist in space. Those discovered have been few and far between, though, so it is best to bring yours with you.

As for the Realms these exiles create, I have heard stories of night-black seas in space, of asteroids honeycombed with living flesh, of screaming stars and glowing, acidic clouds. I imagine that whatever hells these beings — and their masters — create, those Realms are always changing, nightmarish, and suicidal to enter.

Current events may throw off Cerberus' idyllic growth, however. The refugees from the Fors Collegis Mercuris (see Mus, in this chapter) were offered, and have accepted, sanctuary with the Euthanatos. Sources on Cerberus describe the situation as temporary, but with Mus under Nephandic occupation, it's difficult to see where the College refugees could turn next, and they certainly will be staying for the indefinite future. Rumor has it that there is already friction between the residents and their unexpected guests.

Ecology

Cerberus has a normal settlement mix of animals and plants. Its main garden is famous for its selection of rare herbs and flowers.

Space

Shenti

Outside the Horizon, yet close enough to reach, three enigmas exist without any tie to consensual space. No astronomer can detect them, and few Technocratic probes record them. Even so, travelers stumble onto these places every so often. Iteration X even has a base in one of them. For lack of a better term, the Akashic astrologer Cho Lu called these enigmas *Shenti*, or "bodies." It is as appropriate a name as any.

The three Shenti seem to embody aspects of the Metaphysic Trinity, at least in some accessible fashion. Some Akashics believe that the Technocratic Realm Autochthonia rests on the fringes of Stasis' Shenti. Umbral roads lead to a place called the Flux, where Dynamism warps everything it touches. Malfeas, a boiling obscenity of pure corruption, is said by some to be the Shenti of Entropy, or at least of the worst aspects of it. Nephandi and Marauders spring from the latter two Shenti, and the most fanatical Technocrats consider Autochthonia a kind of heaven. Perhaps the Earth itself is the Shenti of the middle Path. I don't know.

All three Realms are very large, apparently stable, spiraling far past the Oort Cloud. Anchorheads link all three to places within the Near Umbra. These places, always hidden, often manifest near places which epitomize their nature. The Technocracy maintains gateways to their chosen home (see Chapter Four), while unpredictable spirits, demons and Umbral storms protect the others (see Chapter Two). Even the maddest Etherjammers avoid the Shenti. I recommend following their example.

The "Great Race"

The Etherjammers themselves pilot their odd craft as far as their theories will carry them. Void Engineers do likewise. Most establish outposts such as the Copernicus Research Center and Victoria Station (Chapter Four) to return to for rest, fuel and food. Though Alexis may hate me for saying so, I find the actions of these "Ethernauts" to be analogous to other Victorian gentlemen who found it impossible to acquire their "trophies" without wiping out whole species. Here is the lesson in the hundreds of lost worlds we may never again discover: Once you snatch your butterfly from the air, it dies.



Chapter Six: Those Beyond

I suppose every single one of us that comes here, knowing that his work will mean contact with extraterrestrials, thinks that he will be an exception, that he'll find a way to make friends with at least some of them. You figure you'll get the Lingoe to teach you a few words... "Hello! How are you? Nice whatsit you've got there!" That kind of thing. You think, we can't just go on forevermore being strangers, right? But when the time comes, and you get close to an Alien, you understand what the scientists are talking about when they say it isn't possible.

— Suzette Haden Elgin, *Native Tongue*



When traveling the Otherworlds, you are going to meet many strange and mysterious beings. Some will be weaker than you are, some stronger. All are dangerous to the unwary, careless or stupid.

In an effort to give our readers an edge in caution, care, and foresight, we set out to present a detailed listing of the most common types of Umbrood. Alexis and I polled Doissetep and our contributors for just those spirits (and other things) they had encountered *frequently*. When the list hit 2,000, we called a halt. The complete Guide to

Umbrood is a task beyond our current scope. (Not that Porthos doesn't have plans already.)

What follows is admittedly a compromise. We chose our favorites from the common, the interesting and the perilous. The descriptions are as detailed as we could make them, and I hope that they will be useful. One warning: Even the best written, best-illustrated guidebook can't really portray the essence of a creature. Treat every Umbrood you meet, no matter how well you think you know it, as if it were unidentified, all-powerful and temperamental — because you might be right.

And show no fear,

— Alexis and The Fisher Princess

Creatures



*God is good, God is great
God's a big invertebrate.*

— Boiled in Lead, "The Microorganism"

Raamas Ka (Alien Horrors)

An obscenity hatched from the outer reaches, this Nephandic pet rides into battle with Fallen warriors wrapped in its tendrils. A shifting mass nearly 50 feet long, the Raamas Ka resembles a boiling merger of a hairball, fog and a nest of spiders. As it rides upon the Umbral winds, the creature bawls like a giant baby or whispers a feminine sing-song of destruction.

In the final days of the war in Europe, Nephandic Labyrinths summoned nearly a dozen Raamas Ka to aid them against the allied Traditions and Technocrats. Wreathed in flame, the creatures bathed in Dresden's firestorms and sucked the souls from Germans trapped in the sewers beneath Berlin. Although mop-up teams believe they got the last of the horrors — *surely* none of them could have survived the Paradox effect for long, anyway—travelers who meet the Fallen in space discover there are plenty more where those came from....

Raamas Ka appear to be intelligent; no one who has not suffered the Nephandic rebirth can communicate with the creatures, but they do seem to recognize battle tactics. The Progenitors and Sons of Ether have both probed the rotting remains of Raamas Ka corpses, but their findings are inconclusive. Primal mysticks who've met the beasts claim they mix flesh, spirit and entropic energies in a highly unstable whole. Mages who've tried to contact

them telepathically have suffered mental hemorrhages and insanity. Some have even burst into black flames.

In combat, a Raamas Ka swirls about its enemies and dissolves their bodies and equipment. Some Nephandi riders suffer the same fate, but the Fallen don't seem to mind; indeed, reports claim the dying Nephandi often laugh as their skin falls away. The Raamas Ka themselves shrug off most forms of harm and magick without pain; although a Device which disrupts the creature's body with pure Prime energies has been successful, Etherjammers have yet to discover a reliable way to harm a Raamas Ka with physical force. Even so, the entities appear to be flesh, not ephemera; Life magick, not Spirit, has the greatest effect on them.

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 3, Stamina 9,
Perception 6, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Stealth 3,
Cosmology 5

Spheres: none

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: OK x 6, -2 x 3, dispelled

Armor Rating: 4

Attacks/Powers: Dissolving touch (6 dice of aggravated damage; can be used at range with a Dexterity + Brawl roll, difficulty 7. Appears to be voluntary); mystick sight (all Spheres at Rank One only)

Innate Countermagick: 4 dice (does not work against Entropy + Prime conjunctional Effects, though it does stop each Sphere separately)

• **Gamespeak Alert:** Storytellers are advised that an encounter with Otherworldly denizens can be much more than a simple "bug hunt"; these creatures, especially the more esoteric ones, operate on wavelengths far different than our own. While a "monster" stands and fights or runs, an Epiphling may buzz wonderingly in and out of an explorer's ear, hoping to see what color her brain is. Similarly, a being who has survived for hundreds or even thousands of years isn't likely to jump into a potentially fatal fight when he could simply wave his fingers and disappear. As a general rule when you're running Umbrood creatures, think of whatever action is most obvious and appropriate. Then do the opposite.

These Umbrood are organized in the following way: **Alien Horrors** are living tools of the Nephandi (or is that the other way around?); **Dream Spirits** inhabit the Realms within the Maya; **Epiphlings** can be found cruising anywhere in the Near Umbrae, and draw from the essence of a single thought or concept; **Major** and **Minor Umbrood** also travel the Airts on their own strange missions, and **Realm Dwellers** inhabit a certain Realm described in an earlier chapter. Note that spirit entities use their Gnosis for Social and Mental Attributes when they've Materialized.

These Umbrood are only the tip of a huge iceberg. Plenty of additional Otherworldly oddities can be found in the following games and sourcebooks;

- **Werewolf** (*Book of the Wyrm*, *Axis Mundi*, *Umbra: The Velvet Shadow*, *Werewolf Storytellers Guide and Players Guide*)
- **Mage** (*The Book of Madness*, *Ascension's Right Hand*, *Horizon: The Stronghold of Hope*. *The Mad Masque* [forthcoming])
- **Wraith** (*The Sea of Shadows*, *Dark Kingdom of Jade Adventures*, *Midnight Express*)
- **Vampire** (*Clanbook Malkavian*, *Storytellers Guide to the Sabbat*)
- **Changeling** (*Changeling Players Guide*)



The Watchers in the Deep (Alien Horrors)

Over the last 50 years, Void Engineers, Sons of Ether and other Deep Umbral travelers reported encounters with a race of mysterious entities. The individuals of this race can be related by their striking and horrifying resemblance to Terran undersea dwellers such as squid, octopi and cuttlefish. By all appearances, all of them are invertebrates and radially symmetrical (as opposed to the bilateral symmetry shared by humans with most of the bony animals on Earth). They possess a number of tentacles that seems to vary from individual to individual, and these tentacles can have the suction cups so familiar to Terrans, barbed hooks similar to the vampire squid of Earth, or even more esoteric things (some survivors have reported leathery, whip like appendages and muscular tendrils bearing energy weapons). Every survivor has mentioned the malevolence of the creatures' gelid blue eyes.

Void Engineers find these things especially disconcerting, since they swim with the greatest ease through the airless Void of space. The Sons of Ether have less difficulty with this concept, though even they find the historical echoes of 100-foot-long tentacles wrapping around their ships and dragging them off to who-knows-where a little disturbing.

These "Watchers" vary wildly in size. Some are tiny enough to swim into the breathing passages of a worldwalking Dreamspeaker. The largest are giants that could swallow the Queen Elizabeth II. Masters of stealth and camouflage, most have chameleonlike hides

that easily match the sleek, shiny hull of a ship or the rocky surface of a dark ore asteroid. One type in particular seems to enjoy terrorizing Technocrats, hiding on the hull of their ships until said vessels are far from help, then effortlessly shredding the bulkheads and slaughtering all the crew they can reach. Void Engineer Marines have taken to calling these Watchers "Hull Squid."

The available data is sparse, comprising nearly incoherent ravings of maimed survivors and a few on-board videos. Based on this evidence and the study of some "squid" tissue remnants, the Progenitors have formed a hypothesis: a foundation race (tentatively named *Cephalapodamalefica*) occupies the region of space now explored by the Void Engineers. This race happens to have some incredible genetic engineering at their disposal and can therefore do exactly what the Progenitors have been dying to do: tailor their own species to the rigors of the Deep Universe, and to any other problems they might encounter, as well.

Obviously, any information leading to the location of this race would be of great interest to the Progenitors.

History: An eon ago, perhaps more, perhaps less, something sluggishly oozed out of the primal slime. Once it moved into the life-giving liquid around it, it began eating smaller, less developed things. And it grew. And it budded. And then there were two.

Soon there were many. One day, a group of the many came together, in just the right way at just the right time in just the right place, and had the first thought: "*We are All.*"

Growth and lifespans beyond imagining created an intensely *patient* and confident race. When the first bony things grew near



them, they ignored them, rather like a middle-aged person will ignore teenagers' fashions as passing fads. The Watchers slowly continued to grow and think and develop, discovering other Realms beyond the simple "pond" of their origin. In time, however, the bony things got annoying. As they began to think, they began to mistakenly believe they could rule the world. Under the glare of an array of icy blue eyes, their burgeoning civilization was extinguished without a whit of mercy.

Subsequent encounters have shown bony things to be a fairly universal annoyance in need of extermination. However, the Watchers have a unique perspective of immense patience. They have time to explore everything to the fullest, and they gather even the tiniest scrap of information before taking action. To this end, they have learned the tricks of genetic engineering, creating a vast array of body types and subspecies, each designed for specific duty. The engineered types include frontal assault machines, tiny intelligence gatheters, and the behemoths that guard the deeply hidden genetic growth centers.

Recently, in Earth's time frame, and a mere eyeblink ago (if they indeed blink) to the Watchers, humans entered into the paradigm of the rulers of the Great Sea (as they call the universe). Somehow, the humans stumbled across one of the Watchers' vessels, tucked away after the last spate of exterminations (see "The Cop"). The actual taking of the ship didn't attract the horrors' attention. Neither did fumbling with the ship's controls and engines. It was the extremely crude and rude manner in which one of the singularity projectiles was injected into one of the Watchers' Deep Ocean portals. After several decades of consideration and distant observation, the Watchers determined that they needed more in-depth information on these new bony things.

The Watchers keep zoos containing the various "specimens" they discover in their explorations — zoos which function as centers of observation and experimentation. Several such zoos have "fallen into" the hands of human explorers, and a number of the Watchers' lesser castes have attacked far-wandering spaceships. A group of Progenitots once managed to obtain some of the Watchers' convoluted genetic material and, through their own tremendously primitive experiments, produced their sentient guard cephalopods (See Technocracy: Progenitors). These creations have actually elicited what might be interpreted as amusement from the home race. The long-term result of this amusement remains to be seen.

Behavior Patterns: The foundation race, *Cephalopoda malefica*, has not yet revealed itself to human eyes. Or if it has, those human eyes are now probably pickled for further study somewhere. They are the most meticulous and patient of all the Watchers, hidden away somewhere in the Deep Universe, watching and watching and watching....

The subspecies, while still sharing the basic behaviors of their parent race, tend to live faster and die sooner, and are therefore not quite as patient. The frontal assault types wait until the best time to strike, and certainly aren't hasty about doing so, but they do indulge themselves a bit, much like a child with a magnifying glass indulges himself with large and juicy bugs

Attributes

Three basic body types of the commonly encountered "squid" exist. These entities bear little resemblance to the "mother race," *C. malefica*. See below for generic attributes for these three as well as *C. malefica*.

Strength:	5 (warriors)	1 (spies)	10-15+ (behemoths)	4-15+ (<i>C. malefica</i>)
Dexterity:	4 (warriors)	3 (spies)	2 (behemoths)	2-4+ (<i>C. malefica</i>)
Stamina:	4 (warriors)	1 (spies)	8-10+ (behemoths)	5-12+ (<i>C. malefica</i>)
Charisma:	0	2 (spies)	0	3 (<i>C. malefica</i>)
Manipulation:	1	5 (spies)	5	5 (<i>C. malefica</i>)
Appearance:	0	0	0	0
Perception:	3 (warriors)	5 (spies)	3 (behemoths)	5 (<i>C. malefica</i>)
Intelligence:	2 (warriors)	5 (spies)	3 (behemoths)	6 (<i>C. malefica</i>)
Wits:	2 (warriors)	5 (spies)	3 (behemoths)	5 (<i>C. malefica</i>)

Abilities

- **Warriors:** Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 5, Dodge 5, Intimidation 4-5, Firearms 1-4, Leadership 2, Meditation 2, Melee 4, Stealth 5+, Survival 4, Technology 2, Computer 2, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 1, Science 2

- **Spies:** Alertness 5, Awareness 3, Brawl 0-2, Dodge 3-5, Intuition 3, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge 3, Meditation 3, Melee 3, Research 2, Stealth 6, Survival 2, Technology 3, Computer 2, Cosmology 2, Culture 1, Enigmas 2, Investigation 4

- **Behemoths:** Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 6, Dodge 0-3, Intimidation 8, Meditation 4, Stealth 3, Survival 5, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 2

- *C. malefica* possess a variety of skills, depending on their professions and roles.

Spheres: none (but see below)

Willpower: 6-10

Health Levels: 8 (warriors); 6 (spies); 16-26 (behemoths); 14-20 (*C. malefica*) Watchers suffer no penalty for injury until their final two Health Levels, at which point they drop to -4. A Watcher's tentacle can withstand one half of the creature's total Health Levels before being cut through. This damage does not count against the Watcher's total Health Levels, but renders that tentacles unusable.

Armor Rating: (see below)

Attacks/Powers: Tentacles (Strength, crushing); beak (Strength + 2 dice damage, difficulty 8); other powers include:

- **Jet Propulsion:** All of the subtypes have the ability to move rapidly through any medium they perceive as liquid or liquid-like (such as water or deep space). The speed of movement averages about 40 mph in viscous solutions like water, or hundreds of miles per hour in space.

- **Chameleonic Coloring:** The Watchers' skin can change rapidly to match the color and texture of its surroundings. Unless someone magickally negates the ability (Life or Forces magick can rework the skin color, or the

light waves which give it color), the Watchers add 3 extra dice to their Stealth pool.

- **Slow Regeneration:** If limbs are severed or otherwise lost, they soon grow back. Warriors grow about one per day, while spies regenerate one per week, and the behemoths could take months.

- **Tentacles:** Watchers may attack multiple foes without dividing their Dice Pools. Alternatively, a Watcher could focus all its attacks upon a single foe, either gaining an extra die for each tentacle used (Dexterity + Brawl, difficulty 8, 5 for vessels), or adding one more damage die per tentacle. Once a creature is grappled, it is immobilized (no Dodge roll versus the tentacles or beak) until it breaks free (Strength roll, difficulty 6 + 1 for each additional tentacle employed).

Some Watchers have several other genetically enhanced abilities that can often be mixed and matched for maximum variety. Few possess more than two such powers, but other specimens might command other powers not listed here.

- **Armor:** The strengthened shell provides two extra soak dice unless opponents specifically target vulnerable areas (raise the difficulty by +1).

- **Ink Cloud:** The Watcher can emit a blinding cloud of ink approximately equal in volume to the body of the creature itself.

- **Squeeze:** Some Watchers have entirely soft bodies and can cram themselves through holes less than a tenth their thickness.

- **Barbs:** Like the vampire squid of Earth, these Watchers have thousands of barbs in place of the suction cups normally occupying their tentacles. Add three dice to the damage Dice Pool.

- **Magick-like Effects:** One or more of the following: Co-locate Self (Correspondence 4); Pierce Gauntlet (Spirit 3); Disruption (either Entropy 3 — for destroying structures and machines — or Entropy 4 — for destroying flesh. Either attack has a Dice Pool of 7.

Amore Muses (Dream Spirits)

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Blighted Touch, Influence, Inspire (grants an additional 3 dice to the subject's Expression die rolls for 24 hours after they meet. Costs three Power); Reform, Shapeshift (some can supposedly Materialize with Physical Traits of 2 or 3 for brief periods)

Image: See below

Everyone dreams of love and lust, and it's no secret that many people draw their greatest inspirations from such dreams. While most Maya scholars believe that the Dream Realms offer a meeting place between mortals and the gods, some lesser spirits bring their own magic to the dreamer's table. Among these spirits are the Amore Muses.

An Amore Muse appears as an incarnation of the dreamer's fantasy partner; this doesn't have to be a lover — parents, siblings, friends and even pets can manifest, causing the dreamer some concern upon waking. Stereotypes aside, lust isn't always a factor in this spirit's involvement. The important thing is that the Muse appears as someone who the dreamer loves so deeply that he's inspired by her presence. This person doesn't even have to exist in "real life," so long as the dreamer is warmed by her presence. Like all Dream spirits, Muses affect the whole tone of the "scene" in which they appear. Subtle differences, like the dimming of light, or major ones, like a sudden sensual thunderstorm, follow the Amore Muse's appearance. Depending on the dream (and on whether or not someone interferes in it), the Amore Muse may stay until the dream fades, leave in anger or tears, or turn into something else — like a Night Terror....

Kid Fears (Dream Spirits)

Willpower 5, Rage 0, Gnosis 8, Power 10, + 10 for every dot in Expression or Wits the target has. In the case of multiple targets, assume 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Materialize, Shapeshift, Tracking (some are rumored to have Possession, Spirit Away, or both)

Materialized Attributes: Strength 3 (only to move or damage objects, never to injure), Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 5, Expression 5, Intimidation 5, Subterfuge 3, Stealth 4, Culture (children) 5

Materialized Health Levels: 3 for every point of the target's Expression; assume 15 for multiple targets

Image: These nightmares get their name from their appearance — dark silhouettes, murky faces at the window, distorted shadows with the liquid grace of a serpent. In some cases, Kid Fears take on the form of a school bully, an abusive parent, a wild clown or a fearsome stranger. Despite the name, Kid Fears disturb adults, too. You never grow out of terror.

Almost counterparts to the Bitter-Sweet Epiphings (see below), the Kid Fears are primal and irrational. Kid Fears are the other side of childhood lost — the darkness in the closet and the tapping at the window which all of us knew so intimately as children. These are the forgotten phobias we outgrew. Kid Fears, unlike Bitter-Sweets, actually seek out contact with those foolish enough to enter the Umbra; though they prefer the Dream Realms as their homes, some actually manifest in the material world for fun and... profit.

Kid Fears bring back the terrors of our youth with the precision of a surgeon. Every beating from an angry parent, every leering stranger who wanted to do dirty things while promising sweet rewards, every creaky floorboard and scurrying spider from the past returns in an instant. Unlike the Bitter-Sweets, Kid Fears like to stay around for as long as they can. They regain Power from a victim's screams and tears. Sometimes these nightmares like to follow the dreamer home. In the waking world, they take the form of some threatening figure and chase the dreamer around for a minute or two, then fade into the shadows... often to reappear later that night, or the next.

As frightening as they appear, Kid Fears cannot inflict real physical harm in any form. Perhaps this explains their relentless hostility. Even so, they can destroy a psyche with little effort. Kid Fears bring out the very worst in their victims. The defensive need to lash out often grows overwhelming, and a violent mage is often a deadly enemy. Nastier Kid Fears can supposedly enter a living host and "drive him around" for a while. Worst of all are those who can drag you back into their personal hells for a long, long game of "I Scream, You Scream."

Night Terrors (Dream Spirits)

Willpower 5 to 8, Rage 5 + 1 per point of the victim's Expression or Wits, Gnosis 8, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Blighted Touch, Flash of Horror (drains one point of temporary Willpower from a mortal on a successful Gnosis roll, difficulty 8. Costs five Power to use. Limit three per dreamer per night). Influence, Shapeshift

Image: See below

High-octane nightmare spirits, the Night Terrors come when a dreamer has summoned up some memory or thought so crippling that it can literally kill. According to sages of the Dreaming, Night Terrors emerge when something has disturbed a person so badly in waking life that she's forced to confront it in her sleep. Mages who enter the Maya on their own occasionally meet these spirits face-to-face, especially when they're on a mission into someone else's psyche. Mind Masters who specialize in dream magick sometimes guard their own dreams with Night Terrors that they control. Such "watchdogs" are risky but effective.

Like most dream spirits, Night Terrors shift form constantly; naturally, each one has an innate knowledge of its target's fears and acts accordingly. Even so, their most devastating attacks come as ambushes: the sleeper or explorer will be passing through some innocuous dreamscape when the Night Terror springs forth and scares the crap out of her — sometimes literally. At worst, Night Terrors can actually kill a dreamer in her sleep.

Unlike Kid Fears, Night Terrors can manifest as a whole scene, usually out of nowhere. A dream about visiting your favorite aunt can suddenly turn into a bound man thrashing while a frenzied mob rips him apart. One image, one Night Terror. When it strikes, the spirit uses either a Flash of Horror Charm or a Rage roll; the former drains the sleeper's Willpower, the latter can kill. Unlike Kid Fears, these spirits don't stick around; they ambush their prey, attack and disappear. Until next time....

Akai (Love Epiphylings)

Willpower 5, Rage 1, Gnosis 10, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Cleanse the Blight, Influence, Shapeshift

Image: Love has many faces. A person who meets an Akai sees whatever she truly loves. This doesn't have to be sexual lust — carnality is a different thing entirely. The spirit may take the form of a Divine being, a departed family member, a beloved child, a soul-mate, or something more esoteric, like a golden ray of light, a violet haze, a rainstorm or even a mirror. Everyone loves something.

Born in the first spark between loving eyes, in the gaze of a new mother on her infant, in the first kiss of lovers and the embrace of brothers, the Akai embody love in all its forms — familial love, chaste friendship, sexual passion, parental affection, even religious awe. Those of faith insist that the Akai came forth when God first gazed upon Creation, or that the spirits sprang from the first touch of the Goddess upon the land. Whatever their origins, Akai come forth when mortals doubt the miracle of their own existence.

An Akai appears in a shimmer of light; while it never appears to be entirely material (it isn't, after all), the spirit impresses everyone in the area with a vision of that which they love most — not of a material pleasure, but that person or thing which gives them hope. Those who touch or are touched by the spirit experience a sudden bliss which removes all doubts from their minds, at least for a while. (In game terms, assume everyone gets two temporary Willpower points, for nonviolent uses only.) Akai rarely speak in any human language, but Spirit Masters have discerned messages of peace and goodwill in the spirits' whispered assurances.

Akai rarely come forth in numbers; when they do, battles have been known to stop and disasters to subside. During moments of impossible hopelessness or tragedy, many people have been visited by a sudden



touch on the shoulder and a soon-forgotten image that let them know everything would be all right in the end. Umbral travelers who've encountered the Akai often meet them at crossroads or during disputes that threaten the group. Though they seem most comfortable in the Vulgate, Akai can be found in any of the Near Worlds, even the Shadowlands.

Bitter-Sweets (Nostalgia Epiphlings)

Willpower 3, Rage 3, Gnosis 8, Power 15

Charms: Airt Sense, Shapeshift, Total Recall (for just a moment, the spirit brings an incapacitating ecstasy from the best moments of the "target's" childhood. For a turn or more, he can't do anything but revel in the sensation; then the feeling falls away, leaving a depression so profound it often leads to tears. Costs three Power)

Image: These spirits have no visible form; they're best described as a shimmer in the air and an almost overwhelming feeling of nostalgia and loss. Most carry an ephemeral scent from some distant memory — Grandma's cookies, your old teddy bear, your first girl's perfume, etc. — or a fleeting sound or touch.

Every child has a special place in his heart for imaginary friends and for the sense of wonder that comes with being new to the world. Every adult must, of necessity, murder that special innocence in order to grow up. Just as ghosts of humans killed by violence linger, sometimes the specters of our childhood continue on long past their time.

Bitter-Sweets are the remains of childhood. Although passing through one can be devastating emotionally, they mean no harm. More roving bits of memory than intelligent beings in their own right, Bitter-Sweet spirits wash over people in either the Umbra or the material world. Even experienced shamans seem unable to speak to them, or to counter their Charms.

Meeting a Bitter-Sweet is a mixed blessing; when the entity first "appears," it drifts across you in a sudden, all-encompassing memory-flash. Every childhood dream and ambition is real again. Every imaginary friend is remembered clearly and the happiest moments from your youth return again with the intensity of a first kiss. The scent of honeysuckle near the softball field returns, along with the excitement of Christmas morning and the mysterious packages beneath the tree.

And then it disappears. Not softly and slowly, as when childhood died the first time, but like the violent slash of a razor across your throat. In one moment, all the dreams of youth are remembered and then murdered again. In their absence, depression crashes down like a hammer. Some people fall into fits of weeping, others grow melancholy for days afterward. Several Nephandi, upon realizing what they've allowed them-

selves to become, have even committed suicide after contact with a Bitter-Sweet. This aftershock is not an attack — it's the natural effect of remembering for just a moment how good your life once was. Many philosophical mages (once they stop crying) comment that meeting a Bitter-Sweet can be an uplifting experience for the same reason. That flash of remembrance lets you recall the happiness that life offers; even though it fades, the person who meets a Bitter-Sweet has the chance some people never get — the chance to relive the best moments of his life.

Loors (Color Epiphlings)

Willpower 4, Rage 3/6, Gnosis 6, Power 15-25

Charms: Airt Sense, Illuminate (lights an area roughly 50 feet around, or changes the color of the light in the same area. Costs three Power.), Influence, Shapeshift

Image: Floating forms of raw color, Loors epitomize those hues we see in spectrums of light. In their basic state, these Epiphlings appear as solid blots hovering in the air. Some seem substantial, like blobs of paint, while others resemble hazes of airbrushed color. While Hermetic scholars claim that one Loor exists for each shade of every color, no one can be sure how many there really are.

Travelers who meet these Epiphlings claim they speak an empathic language of tones and tints. As a Loor converses, it wavers and fuzzes, sending streamers or clouds of itself to the recipient. These tendrils influence the subject's mood (as the Charm), communicating the spirit's feelings to her. The spirit's "partner" can reply through Mind or Forces magick, or by manipulating her own sentiments (Wits + Expression) or the local color spectrum. Loors do not understand spoken words, sounds or abstract thoughts, only feelings and colors.

Most Loors seem peaceful, more curious than anything else. Vivid spirits, like black, red, orange, violet or white, seem aggressive toward strangers (no one's sure what they'd call "friends," but Loors do seem to recognize certain individuals after meeting them once). These latter Epiphlings have a higher Rage score than more passive hues like blue, green or pink. Those who study auras claim that the soul-colors descend from the primal essence of these spirits; thus, an explorer who recognizes the meaning of these hues can guess the temperament of a Loor (see chart). Travelers who encounter a Loor all feel the mood-essence of the spirit's color long after it departs.

Although "real" colors may be changed by fluctuations of light waves, no magick may alter the essence of a Loor. They are eternally what they appear to be. Such spirits often travel through the lowest reaches of the Vulgate, but occasionally venture into the Middle World or High reaches as well.

Loors

Mood-Essence

Passivity

Envy

Comfort

Love

Hate

Sadness

Depression

Joy

Sympathy

Rage

Lust Dark

Excitement

Fear

Serenity

Wisdom

Color

Light Green

Deep Green

Light Blue

Deep Blue

Black

Silver-Gray

Gray

White

Pink

Red

Red

Violet

Orange

Yellow

Gold

Nemesis (Guilt Epiphlings)

Willpower 10, Rage 5, Gnosis 10, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Cleanse the Blight, Influence, Know the Sin (allows the spirit to discern what a target's worst misdeeds. Requires a Willpower roll. The difficulty depends on the person; a really guilty or sinful person would be 3 to 5, while a virtual saint would be a 9 or 10. Costs three Power), Mindspeech, Shapeshift, Tracking

Image: The Nemesis appear as punishment incarnate, or as evidence of dirty deals. A lapsed Christian might see the Face of God or a vengeful angel; a corrupt politician might be haunted by visions of bribe money or angry constituents. To a follower of Kali, the Nemesis would appear as an angry representation of the Goddess, set on retribution. Whatever the actual shape may be, it's always backed in a white light of powerful intensity — a light referred to as "Nemesis' Halo."

Everyone has things they'd like to forget; Nemesis spirits embody those feelings of guilt, those dirty secrets, hidden fears or covert lusts that cry out for punishment. The Nemesis is only too happy to oblige.

In the material world, a Nemesis Epiphling appears to the sinner alone, a proverbial "tell-tale heart" that can drive her to confess or repent. In the Umbra, such spirits float outside the Afterworlds, assuring that visitors deserve to enter. In that state, the Nemesis appear as terribly beautiful women made of

painfully bright light. From time to time, flashes of fire burst out from their eyes and burn the sinners before them. After all, "there are none righteous, no not one." Those who fall before their Rage suffer painful but impermanent damage; when a victim "dies," her Health Levels return. If she has confessed her crimes and repented by then, she regains any Willpower she may have spent up to her normal rating. If not, she is flung from the Umbra and back to the material world. Those who admit their wrongdoings find that a Nemesis is kind and understanding, willing to discuss human imperfections. Those who maintain their innocence burn until they see the truth.

As Christian as the concept of the Nemesis might seem, their origins lie in the first comprehensions of right and wrong. As soon as humans (or perhaps their forebears) realised that some actions were "good" and others "evil," they began to be disturbed by the conflict between the two. This conflict shuts many people out from the sight of whatever they acknowledge as heaven — only by admitting that they've done wrong can sinners walk in peace. Nemesis spirits embody the guilt that comes with wrongdoing. By invoking the spirits' fire, a mortal punishes herself. No one, they say, meets a Nemesis without cause.

Shanti (Peace Epiphlings)

Willpower 5, Rage 0, Gnosis 8, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Cleanse the Blight, Influence

Image: See below

Rare as they may seem in the modern world, these spirits of peace do exist. Explorers who've met them speak of healing winds, calm hearts and stilled tempers whenever these Epiphlings passed by. Obviously, such spirits are drawn to people or places attuned to their essence — places with quiet, restful and balanced energies (Resonance). Some Shanti follow people around, either as unseen companions or as spirit-guides. While most peace spirits wander off eventually, some pick a spot or patron and stay until something happens to it.

Shanti wash across those who meet them like water. To the Umbral eye, such spirits usually take the form of a translucent wave, a rainbow-hued cloud or an archetypal image like a dove or a tree. No matter what form it attains, a Shanti blows freely in an ever-present breeze. No force or obstacle can hold it in place for very long. Sometimes, especially in glen Domains, a Shanti or two will settle, coloring the place with their presence. Most times, though, the Epiphling moves on to another destination, or is driven off by violence, envy or fear.



Angelics/Celestials (Major Umbrood)

Just as humanity invents demonic terrors from its fears and hatreds, its better nature invents angelic hosts. Call them devas, seraphim, totem spirits, angelic hosts, or a hundred other names; either way, such entities embody justice, righteousness and Divine will.

The usual authorities debate whether or not these celestial beings predate humanity, and whether or not our desires shape their forms. While religious and spiritual mysticks maintain that these higher powers carry the shape of the Almighty, more secular studies prove that whatever their original form may have been, these angels usually resemble what a worshipper expects to see. There's no real reason why both ideas can't be true. After all, they say that Divinity wears a thousand faces. Why can't its servants do likewise?

Each faith has its angels, guardians, protectors and avengers. Like the demons they oppose, these spirits embody creation itself—they're like forces of nature, not people with wings. Some Angelics may be stern and fierce, while others tend the sick, nurture lost children or lead pilgrims off on enigmatic (but always fruitful) quests. Those who believe in the original Pure Ones insist that Angelics are Avatars unencumbered by flesh; others call them the hand servants of whatever Divinity exists. The most cynical mages claim that Angelics are just another form of Umbrood. These folks do not, we should note, make that claim to an angel's face!

That face may take a hundred different forms; tales speak of winged humans, talking animals, naked and sexless spirits, beings of light, or towering figures looming across the sky. Although some Celestials appear as blazing balls of fire, most of them take on a recognizable form and personality. Mages given to record-keeping maintain long lists of angelic hosts, their provinces and their powers. If these records are to be believed, thousands upon thousands of Celestials roam creation on endless errands. Maybe they're right. If so, the majority of Angelics stay out of obvious sight. Unless an explorer actually visits the Heavens, angels leave most humans to pursue their own destinies. Unlike their demonic kin, Celestials seem to come and go between worlds; neither Horizon nor Gauntlet hinders them. When a Celestial does appear openly, she ripples creation itself with her presence; winds blow, birds sing, colors brighten and lights flare brightly. The sheer charisma of an angelic being in full glory is enough to knock most mortals to their knees. Talk about getting religion!

The two characters below represent two Angelics who occasionally deal with mysticks. The minor angels walk the Earth in many forms and tend to mortal matters, while greater Celestials roam the Otherworlds and rarely venture to Earth except on the most extreme occasions. All Angelics have mortal and immortal forms, one to travel with, one to impress with. Note that most shapechangers and their allies have their own angels — the totem spirits and Incama described in the various Werewolf books.

Kalina (Minor Angel - Minion)

Willpower 10, Rage 8, Gnosis 8, Power 50

Charms: Airt Sense, Appear, Annor, Blast Flame, Cleanse the Blight, Create Fires, Influence, Create Wind, Lightning Bolts, Materialize, Mind Speech, Reform, Shapeshift, Spirit Away, Tracking; Kalina's damaging Charms usually inflict 8 dice, and her Armor often stands between 5 and 10

Dominion: Protection

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Child

Essence: Primordial

Materialized Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 7, Stamina 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 5, Awareness 7, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Expression 3, Intimidation 5, Etiquette 7, Leadership 3, Melee 5, Technology 4, Cosmology 5, Culture 5, Enigmas 7, Linguistics 7, Lore (all) 5, Occult 8

Materialized Health Levels: 15

A defender of children and a guardian of purity, Kalina has a mischievous nature surprising in an Angelic. Although tales about her first appear in the *Shorot Sutra* nearly 1,000 years ago, this entity acts like a young woman with a lusty humor and a constant smile. In some guises, Kalina is pregnant and speaks in a mother's lullaby; other times, she resembles a dancing girl from some Tantrick bas relief. Unless something endangers her charge, this angel likes to laugh, play games and sing. No wonder children love her — Kalina is childlike eternally.

This angel is slow to anger, but her fury is venomous. She tries to joke and charm those who anger her first; if this doesn't work, she'll take a firm but polite stance and block them from whatever evil they might try. If anyone actually attack the angel, the Afterworlds will probably receive a new tenant soon enough. Kalina laughs like a child, dances like a woman, and kills like a typhoon.

Image: A young woman of Indian descent, Kalina dresses to suit the occasion when in disguise but wears only elaborate Hindu jewelry and a barik skirt in her immortal form. In one hand, she bears a lotus, in the other, a dagger. Depending on the needs of the moment, she can use either one to comfort or to destroy.

When disguised as a mortal, this angel has two arms, legs and eyes. When pressed, she can shift into an immortal guise with six arms, three eyes and an overpowering aura. Sometimes she appears as a cow or a peacock (her favorite animals) or a waterspout spinning across the ground.

Gabriel (Higher Celestial - Incarna)

Contain yourself! This is one who cannot be fought.

— The Phantom Stranger, "Down Amongst the Dead Men" (*Swamp Thing Annual* #2, by Alan Moore)

Dominion: Wrath

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Judge

Essence: Pattern

Image: A stern and forceful archangel, Gabriel embodies the anger of God and His displeasure with sinners. Although most art depicts him as a white man with blond hair and fiery blue eyes (a guise he sometimes affects), his immortal form towers nearly a thousand feet into the sky, with wings that span the horizon and eyes dark as storm clouds. His skin shimmers blue-black in the lightning which surrounds his body, and the skies deepen into twilight, Gabriel's voice is a thousand thunderclaps, and anyone who even *thinks* of questioning him (let alone fighting him) is immediately silenced by his grandeur. If this is only a *servant* of God, what must God Him/Her/Itself be like...?

Lunes (Minor Umbrood)

Willpower 8, Rage 4 (8 during the full moon), Gnosis 7, Power 35

Charms: Airt Sense, Open Moon Bridge (creates a Moon Bridge to wherever the Lune desires. Costs five Power), Reform

Image: See below

The handmaidens of the Moon Herself, these bright spirits confound the Technomancers at Darkside Moonbase and guide (or mislead) travelers in the Middle Umbra. Although they tend to be peaceful — if somewhat erratic — most of the time, these spirits become hostile and outright dangerous during the full moon.

Lunes appear as shimmering ribbons of gold-blue light which pulsate and twist into enigmatic shapes. Those who can read them (Perception + Enigmas, difficulty 6 to 9) recognize prophecies of the near future (like a Time 2 Precognition Effect). Like will-o-wisps, Lunes dart along the Airts and Moon Paths, hover over the Pattern Web, or dance across the Moon itself. Those who've tried to communicate through Mind magick find nothing to speak of, but the spirits' actions betray some abstract intelligence. "Talking" to a Lune is possible (though trying) to those who know the language of spirits.

Trinity Spirits (Minor Umbrood)

At the far ends of the Metaphysic Trinity, spirits form to represent the extremes. In the case of Entropy, those spirits often become the demons, Spectres and Banes that encourage all forms of corruption (see *The Book of Madness*, *Wraith* and many *Werewolf* books). At another end of the triangle, Stasis breeds both Pattern Umbrood who build the interlacing grid holding the Tellurian together, and the Paradox spirits all mages fear. Garou call this aspect the Weaver, and distrust its brood. Extreme Dynamism leads to Chaos manifestations, which some call Wyld spirits. These unpredictable Umbrood whirl in living clouds of possibility, changing their natures to suit their whims.

The Shenti (see Chapter Five) are aswarrn with these so-called "trinity spirits," although the Umhrood can be found almost anywhere in the Tellurian. Realms strong with a particulaessence are more likely to host agiven type of spirit, but even the methodical Pattern Spiders tend to venture into other worlds. Travelers who try to communicate with trinity spirits find they tend to be rather single-minded and often barely intelligent. In the Umbrood hierarchy, they're Minions or Gafflings. Even so, those who understand the spirit ways (Spirit Lore or Enigmas 3 or better) can gain insights from the limited thought-patterns such Umbrood possess.

Pattern spirits weave and repair the Pattern Web which links the Otherworlds. Travelers familiar with Garou feel these Umbrood do their job too well. Realms constructed by the Technocracy swarm with Pattern spirits, like the Pattern Spiders found in Mage (page 283). Ironically, the Technocrats who recognize the spirits' existence at all consider the Umbrood to be technomagickal machines of their own design. In a way, they are. Another form of Pattern spirits, often called Geomids, embody information. Especially common in the Digital Web, these Umbrood carry messages, plans or attack, programs. The Garou say they provide a "message service" to the more active Pattern Spiders.

Chaos spirits embody change in all its forms. Few of them maintain a stable body for any length of time. Instead, they waver and billow, shifting colors and textures as they transform everything around them into chaos, too. Shapeshifter shamans insist that the Wyld is blissfully unaware, that it has no sentience to speak of, and thus remains sane while the other two have gone out of control. Many mages, fascinated by the idea of unformed potential, wish to guide this intuitive force to greater awareness. Perhaps with Dynamism truly awake, creation could be saved from its downward spiral. Other mysticks point to the theory's living example — the Marauders. The Mad Ones seem to be proof of the concept of self-aware Dynamism — and the greatest argument for why it shouldn't be pursued any further.

Pattern Spirits - Geomids

- Informational

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 10, Power 20-100

Charms: Airt Sense, Reform, Informational Link (allows access to all the knowledge in the local Pattern Web. A Gnosis roll, difficulty 9, lets them answer any question they desire. Costs 10 Power.), Solidify Reality

- Attack

Willpower 9, Rage 6, Gnosis 4, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Materialize, Reform, Group Fusion (a group of three or more Attack Geomids may surround a target and fuse together around her. Each one drains one dot in a Physical Attribute from the target every turn, and they hold her with a strength equal to the spirit's Willpower. Once the target has lost all her Physical Attributes, she is calcified. Costs one Power/turn.)

- Structural

Willpower 8, Rage 5, Gnosis 10 Power 30-150

Charms: Airt Sense, Reform, Solidify Reality

These Pattern spirits take one of three forms: Informational, Attack and Structural. The first incarnate bits of information, which may be accessed by someone with the right skills; these second defend other types or attack intruders who try to destroy their territory; Structural Geomids provide stability and information for the other Web-builders. All three varieties resemble large geometric shapes in an array of colors.

Chaos Spirits

- Color Strings

Willpower 10, Rage 1, Gnosis 9, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Intangibility (allows the spirit to shift into a Zone, remaining visible but untouchable, even to those in the Umbra. Costs seven Power), Reform

Playful and mischievous spirits, Color Strings resemble thin threads of ever-changing hue. These small chaos Umbrood enjoy companionship; more to the point, they enjoy people they can play pranks on. Alighting on clothing, gear or exposed skin, Strings pulsate with rainbow colors or hover in the air right in front of a "visitor's" face. Capricious guides, they often lead a traveler to some valuable revelation... or into a trap. Although the Strings tend to be solitary, some congregate into groups, weaving themselves into brilliant and beautiful patterns before dissolving into tangled masses.

- Vortices

Willpower 8, Rage 8, Gnosis 10, Power 80

Charms: Airt Sense, Break Reality (by disrupting the reality of a substance, the spirit can turn it into something it was not, or change its shape to suit the spirit's purposes better. The more successful the spirit's Gnosis roll, the greater the alteration. Making a door in a wall would demand two successes; turning the wall into Swiss cheese would take five or more. Costs two to 10 Power, depending on the change), Disorient, Materialize, Reform, Shapeshift

Materialized Attributes: Strength 8 (inflicts aggravated damage), Dexterity 8, Stamina 8

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 7, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Expression 3, Intimidation 5, Cosmology 5, Enigmas 7

Materialised Health Levels: 10

At the opposite end of the Wyld spectrum, the mega-destructive Vortex whirls through an area undoing all it touches. A virtual tornado of energy and matter in one, this Umbrood occasionally passes into the material world as well, ripping apart the landscape and draining magickal energies from Nodes. Powerful Marauders often summon them for battles on both sides of the Horizon. More often, however, Vortices hover about the Deep Umbra, or at the fringes of Anchorheads, which they resemble. Travelers' tales recount the grisly fates of those who mistook a Vortex for a breach in the Horizon....

- Wonderwhats

(Beauty/beast forms) Willpower 8/4, Rage V8, Gnosis 8/8, Power 30

Charms: Airt Sense, Shapeshift Tracking (*Beauty form*: Create Wind, Influence, Heal (cures 1 Health Level per 2 Power spent), Mindspeech. *Beast form*: Armor (6 points), Blighted Touch)

These chaos spirits are drawn to mages much like moths to flame. When they appear, experienced Umbral travelers run. There's no telling *what* will happen when the Wonderwhat attains its full form.

A Wonderwhat first appears as a sphere of light, much like a will-o-wisp. Some people even hypothesize that these spirits *are* will-o-wisps, though no one is certain. After locating a "patron," the Wonderwhat immediately takes one of two forms: the form of the beauty or the form of the beast.

The beauty appears either as a magnificent butterfly of enormous size and impossible colors, or as an androgynous being with wings of fire. Both are harmless and will follow an explorer for hours before growing bored and leaving. Some few can actually speak, and these often aid the traveler by offering directions or even leading the way past dangerous areas.

The beast form of the Wonderwhat is an ephemeral nightmare, a gangrenous mass of rotting meat and internal organs with a vile temper. Teeth and fangs sprout from within its shapeless body, and long, deformed limbs grow from its depths, reaching out with barbed claws and spidery fingers. The only good news is that beast manifestations seem less common than the beauty.

Typhon, Jagging of Ialdabaoth (Realm Dweller - Midrealm)

Willpower 8, Rage 10, Gnosis 5, Power 50

Charms: Armor, Fear (treat as Calcify, but the petrification is purely psychological and drains Willpower, Costs three Power), Materialize, Tracking, Venom Spray (inflicts 10 dice damage in an area 2 yards x 10 yards. Once hit, the target suffers damage over time, at 2 dice per turn. It the first 2 dice can be soaked, no damage occurs. Dexterity + Brawl to attack. Costs 20 Power.)

Dominion: Ruin

Nature: Critic

Demeanor: Bravo

Essence: Primordial

Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidate 5, Subterfuge 5, Stealth 1, Survival 5

Spheres: Entropy 5

Arete: 6

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK (x3), -1 (x4), -3 (x4), Incapacitated

Attacks/Powers: Bite (9 dice, difficulty 8); claw (8 dice, difficulty 8)

Description: An aspect of Ialdabaoth, Typhon has existed for as long as anyone, mage or Umbrood, can recall. This manifestation can be destroyed, but another will form within days.

Typhon is a giant twisting serpent with centipede legs and a head at both ends. Its thorny scales are as black as despair. Only the beast's milky eyes are clearly visible. However, most hear Typhon — a sound like the buzzing of a million flies, and the hiss of dripping venom — long before seeing it. Those who sense the Great Creeper's approach freeze in terror.

This beast has but three duties, which it performs more out of natural inclination than out of a sense of duty: By gnawing on the Alder Bole's roots, it hopes to free the Void trapped beneath. It guards the twisting root-tunnels leading to the Low Umbra because it considers this a lair. Finally, Typhon occasionally leaves the darkness to patrol Midrealm, and has a particular hatred for those who would attain the Fruits of Eternity,

Protean Hawk (Realm Dweller - Midrealm)

Willpower 8, Rage 5, Gnosis 7, Power 35

Charms: Airt Sense, Create Wind, Disorient (Lets the spirit confuse travelers by altering landmarks and directions with a successful Gnosis roll. Costs two Power,), Materialize, Reform, Tracking, Updraft (lifts man-sized creatures into the air. Costs three Power.)

Dominion: Creation

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Guardian

Essence: Primordial

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Athletics 3, Awareness 5, Brawl 2, Dodge 4, Investigation 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4, Cosmology 3, Culture 5, Occult 5

Spheres: Prime 5

Arete: 6

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 20

Health Levels: OK, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Attacks: Bite (6 dice, difficulty 6), claw (5 dice, difficulty 8)

Description: The Protean hawk is a manifestation of Dynamic essence. It resides in the uppermost branches of the Alder Bole, patrolling the branch-ways toward the High Umbra. The Protean Hawk can be driven off or even killed, but will eventually return (or another will take its place).

Due to prolonged contact with the Alder Bole's Pattern, the Protean Hawk has a more stable form than most Wyld spirits. Its voice recalls an eccentric elder speaking in a traveler's native language — sometimes male, others female. It resembles a large, though otherwise mundane, bird of prey, though the bird's silhouette and coloration match no known genus.

The Protean Hawk is fickle and unfathomable. It may swoop to the attack without cause or treat a stranger like an old friend and detain her indefinitely in trivial conversation. The toll to pass the into the High Umbra is based upon the Hawk's whim: it could be 1 to 10 points of Quintessence, a Talisman, a promise of one's first child, a kiss, currency (from rupees to cowry shells), an entertaining tale, nothing, a mundane object (somehow transformed into ephemera), or whatever. The scary thing is, should the cabal go find the required object and return with it, the toll may have changed!

Bollix (Realm Dwellers - S.R. Life)

Monkey see, monkey do.

Voted the most annoying creatures in Etherspace five years running, the bollixes seem to have been created to vex technological voyagers to Venus' Penumbra.

Many are the Scientists who have awakened to find their camp overrun by a tribe of the vicious little tinkers. Gifted with little intelligence but a great deal of mechanical instinct, the bollixes *love* shiny objects that *do* things. Camp stoves, sensor scopes, jet packs or ray guns — anything the bollixes can get their hands on, they will steal, make work or break as fast as they can.

Verbena and Dreamspeakers who live and work in the Venusian jungles merely smile when the little lizards run through their camps — the only shiny equipment they usually keep are athames, heads and mirrors, none of which can keep the little buggers interested long enough to be stolen. Most of these mages even call them cute.

The average bollix stands about two feet high, and looks like a combination of a newt, a lizard and a kangaroo. The long tail (roughly half the length of the bollix concerned) is prehensile. It's used for balance when the creature walks or hops on its powerful, three-toed hind legs, but a bollix can also hang from branches or swing branch to branch with its tail. A bollix's arms are smaller, but strong and well-adapted to boreal locomotion. The front toes (four to a foot) are more like fingers, but we can all thank the One that the bollix never developed a true opposable thumb.

Even healthy bollixes look emaciated to human eyes; their shiny, moist skin seems pulled tight over bare bones. This appearance is deceptive; though not strong individually, a small tribe of bollixes (four or five) can overpower a grown man.

Bollixes travel in social groups called tribes. Tribes range in size from three to 50, and stake out large areas of territory (in the jungles, not the marshes) which they mark with cairns of shiny stones, bits of metal and white fungi or flowers. Lone bollixes are rare, but apparently less belligerent than the groups — Enain Thorngrove of the Circle of Seven supposedly tamed one and kept it as a familiar. Bollixes will not attack unless travelers disturb them or their territorial markings, or unless travelers have something the bollixes want. Because most explorers on Venus today come "prepared" with tropical camping gear or increasingly techno tools for their magicks, bollix attacks are on the rise.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Intuition 1, Drive 0 (1 if the creature can watch the vehicle operated first), Firearms 0 (1 if the creature has "met" a gun before), Melee 1, Stealth 3, Survival 4 (Venus' jungles), Technology 2 (apparently pure instinct), Medicine 1

Willpower: 4

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -4, Incapacitated

Attacks: Bollixes without technological exposure use their weaker front legs to hold on to a foe while their clawed back legs rip into it (claw, 3 dice). With a little more know-how, the tool-using critters grab big sticks and try to swing at the enemy while hanging upside-down from vines and branches. It doesn't always work, but they enjoy it. (difficulty 7, 4 dice.) Most bollixes take to knives, swords and guns immediately if they ever get the chance, but it takes them a few turns to sort things out. Until the bollix rolls a success, it cannot use the weapon at all. If the bollix botches any roll using a weapon, it wounds or kills itself or the bollix next to it.

Powers: The bollix's only power is its innate technological instincts and an amazing memory for actions performed in sequence. Push a button in front of a bollix, and the bollix will remember what you did, what happened next, and what you did before and afterward.

Dinosaurs (Realm Dwellers - Hidden Earth)

On some Realms, the creatures from Earth's past remain alive and well. The following statistics cover a variety of creatures; an exhaustive list would take up a whole chapter or two.

As a general note, dinosaurs are generally considered creatures of instinct. Naturally, you the Storyteller can play a dinosaur as you see fit. After all, there's no reason why a Horizon Realm tyrannosaurus can't have evolved better reasoning abilities than its ancient counterparts had. Imagine a 50-foot-long version of the velociraptors in Jurassic Park. Scary? It should be....

Carnosaurs (Meat-Eating Dinosaurs)

The ultimate "killing machines" of prehistoric times, carnosaurs range from 10' long to more than 50' from nose to tail. Towering into the air, these gigantic meat-eaters exhibit certain common characteristics: large heads — equipped with rending jaws — set upon massive necks, sturdy hind-quarters, vestigial forelimbs and tanklike bodies. The most easily identifiable members of this group of dinosaurs include the allosaurus and tyrannosaurus rex. Smaller examples include deinonychus and the infamous velociraptor.

The allosaurus, or "strange" reptile, possesses a squat, stocky body, powerful hind legs, a short back and massive shoulders. A distinctive, bony ridge above the eyes marks its rounded head. A long, thick tail helps balance the creature's top-heavy build. Its jaws contain sharp, serrated teeth ideal for stabbing and cutting. Both its powerful hind limbs and stubby forelegs possess large claws. The creature's huge, cumbersome mass keeps it from engaging in long-distance, high-speed pursuit, so the allosaurus feeds on the larger herbivorous dinosaurs, hunting them in groups and pulling down weaker individuals. Allosaurus also scavenges the kills of other, faster carnivores,

Tyrannosaurus rex, the "tyrant" of dinosaurs, is easily the biggest and most notorious of the carnivores. More than 40' long, this monstrous predator weighs up to seven tons. Multiple layers of muscles power the creature's enormous legs, allow for freedom of movement along its hindquarters *and* give surprising mobility to its massive, blunt head. Its broad hind feet end in sharp talons, allowing it to grip the ground as it moves. A heavy, elongated tail provides a counterbalance for its body. Its tiny forearms seem almost an afterthought.

The hunting style of tyrannosaurus rex combines short bursts of speed with canny stalking tactics. As an active hunter, this creature frequently waits to ambush its prey. Its long stride enables it to outdistance smaller, "quicker" creatures. The sheer impact of tyrannosaurus' jaws, backed up by seven tons of bodyweight, generally ensures a short, bloody confrontation between predator and victim. In a pinch, tyrannosaurus rex also subsists on scavenged food.

The smaller "raptor" predators measure roughly eight to 12 feet in length. They kill mainly with powerful hind legs equipped with huge disemboweling talons, but also use their sharp, ripping teeth. Stiff balancing tails compensate for a hunched-over running stance, while raptors' forelegs function better than the larger beasts' withered limbs. These dinosaurs prefer pack tactics and ambush over face-to-face battles; one tends to draw the prey's attention while the others rush in from the sides or chase it to exhaustion. Once in close, these smaller carnosaurs slash with their scimitar claws, ripping the opponent open, then feast on its entrails.





Attributes: Strength 3 to 10, Dexterity 3 to 5, Stamina 3 to 10, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3 to 6, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 1 to 3, Brawl 3, Stealth 1 to 3, Survival 4, Tracking 3

Spheres: none

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: *small*: OK x 2, -1 x 3, -2, -4, Incap.; *middle*: OK x 3, -1 x 3, -2 x 3, -4, Incap.; *large*: OK x 5, -1 x 4, -2 x 4, -4 x 2, Incap.

Armor Rating: 1/3/5

Attacks/Powers: Bite (Strength + 2, difficulty 7. If the victim fails to soak at least half the damage, he has either been bitten in half or swallowed whole); claw (Strength + 3, difficulty 7); tail (Strength + 1, difficulty 5)

Herbosaurs (Plant-Eating Dinosaurs)

The chief danger associated with these gigantic herbivores is being trampled by them, or getting between them and whatever might be pursuing them. This group includes the diplodocus and apatosaurus, which exemplify the popular image of the dinosaur. They possess long necks, longer tails, and four equal-length legs. Apatosaurus weighs about 30 tons and feeds on low-lying vegetation. Diplodocus only weighs 10 to 11 tons, but is longer, at 88 feet, than the

apatosaurus. Another notable herbivore is brachiosaurus, the most massive dinosaur known at 74 feet and 77 tons. Its extremely long neck allows it to feed, like giraffes, from high trees when the animal lifts itself up on its hind legs.

Some herbivores offer more of a threat. Triceratops, a horned dinosaur that reaches a length of 30 feet and a weight of 5 1/4 tons, possesses three sharp yard-long horns on its face, one horn on the snout and one above each eye. A bony frill protects its neck. Stegosaurus, the best known of the spike-tailed dinosaurs, displays a double row of tail spines extending the length of the backbone. All have the flat teeth characteristic of the herbosaurs. Such teeth are used for pulling and grinding plants, rather than for biting into meat.

Attributes: Strength 8 to 15, Dexterity 2 to 4, Stamina 15 to 20, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 1, Wits 1 to 3

Abilities: Alertness 1 to 3, Brawl 1 to 3, Survival 4

Spheres: none

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: (oh, geeze — just assume 15 for armored herbivores and 20 to 30 for the larger ones. Do you *really* want to keep track of Health Level penalties for something this big?)

Armor Rating: 4

Attacks/Powers: Stomp (Strength + 3, Difficulty 8); Horns (Strength + 3, difficulty 8 versus man-sized targets, 5 otherwise.)

Pterosaurs and Plesiosaurs

Pterosaurs are winged reptiles, contemporaries of the dinosaurs. Like birds, they have light structures and air passages throughout their bodies. Though they're generally much weaker than the dinosaurs, pterosaur wingspans can reach 50 feet. Their teeth are set into long snouts, enabling them to skim fish as they fly over the surface of the water or to crack and eat eggs. Further, their taloned feet can pick up man-sized or smaller creatures. Pterosaurs drop victims seized in this fashion from a height of several hundred feet, a process that serves both to tenderize their meal and to expose its more detectable parts for the creatures to devour at leisure. Rumors abound of aerial battles between tribes of pterosaur-mounted warriors.

Plesiosaurs are marine mammals, often mistaken for dinosaurs. Possessed of long necks, compact broad bodies, flipper like paddle arms and short tails, they also have sharp teeth and large mouths.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Survival 4, Tracking 2

Spheres: none

Willpower: 8

Health Levels: OK x 3, 4 x 3, -2 x 2, -4, Incap. (if a pterosaur takes enough damage to bring it to -2, it can no longer fly and must land.)

Armor Rating: 2

Attacks/Powers: Bite (7 dice), claws (6 dice); buffet (3 dice damage from either pterosaur wings or plesiosaur flippers); dropping people from great altitudes (see Mage, page 265.)

Interface (Realm Dweller - Autochthonia)

Each of Autochthonia's 10 reception rooms is minded by an Interface — a once-human Technomancer who has melded with the Realm. They are responsible for screening visitors who step from the Digital Imaging Chambers, providing directions, interfacing with the Realm's computer system (even some Iterators are more comfortable addressing a living person than a computer), and distributing power.

Each Interface resembles an attractive human face emerging from the wall amid wires and pipe. Minuscule circuitry and tooling decorate their skin like hitech tattoos. An Interface is stationary and has no limbs or locomotion. They can access the Net via astral immersion, however; there, their icons look completely normal. Normally courteous to visitors, they become cold and ruthless when confronted by intruders or inefficiency. Those who break rules in front of an Interface are terminated with extreme prejudice.

Attributes: Strength N/A, Dexterity N/A, Stamina N/A, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 5, Intelligence 6, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Instruction 1, Sense Deception 4, Etiquette 4, Research 5, Technology 3, Area Lore 5 (Autochthonia), Computer 3, Culture 3, Investigation 3, Linguistics 10

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 1, Forces 4, Life 1, Matter 1, Mind 3, Prime 3, Time 1

Willpower: 5

Arete: 5

Quintessence: effectively unlimited.

Paradox: 16 (permanent; cost of being merged with a computer)

Armor Rating: 5

Health Levels: OK x 5, Incap.

Attacks/Powers: Magick, astral projection (to the Web only)

Pulse Units 1 (one) to 1010 (10) (Realm Dweller - Autochthonia)

An as-yet untested experiment, Project Pulse is intended to create the next generation for Iteration X - Technomancers raised entirely within the Net. Before their birth, 10 gifted infants were abducted from Earth or acquired from the Progenitors, integrated with artificial life-support systems, and cyber-linked to the Computer. Taught by computer simulation, the infant Pulse units are already a match for many adult Virtual Adepts. When mature, they will form the nucleus of a new Net Corps which will finally secure the entire Digital Web.

Pulse units are the latest in cybertech: their CPU provides raw processing power and automated responses, while their biological components confer instincts, a rapid learning curve, and an Avatar. Despite appearances, these are not infants, but rather databases that require information. Not surprisingly, nature-mages would regard Pulse units as abominations. It remains to be seen whether one could ever be saved if rescued.

In the Net, the Pulse units rarely bother with icons. Their presence can only be sensed by the invisible electronic impulses of their pattern codes. This has no effect on combat, but can prove unnerving to Earth-born mages, who remain effectively blind to them. In Autochthonia, their physical forms resemble discolored babies suspended in tanks of nutrient solution and cyber-linked to a computer system. As they mature, the redundant flesh and bones are stripped away until only the growing brain remains.

(Note on statistics: Though essentially children, the Pulse units have access to computer databases that supply the rudiments of many Skills and Knowledge; this explains such seeming contradictions as an infant with Melee 1. The stats in parenthesis below represents the projected values of a Pulse unit upon reaching maturity.)

Attributes: Strength N/A, Dexterity N/A, Stamina N/A, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1 (5), Appearance N/A, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 1 (2), Dodge 2 (3), Intimidation 1 (3), Firearms 1 (2), Melee 1 (2), Research 3, Stealth 3, Technology 1 (2), Area Lore 2 (5) (Digital Web), Computer 3 (6), Investigation 1 (3), Law 1 (3) (Technocratic), Mathematics 3

Backgrounds: Arcane 5, Destiny 3, Mentor 5

Spheres: Correspondence 1 (3), Forces 1 (3), Mind 1 (4), Prime 1 (3)

Willpower: 5

Arete: 1 (4)

Quintessence: 20

Paradox: 0

Attacks/Powers: Magick, astral projection (Web only)

Etherships



Give me one tall ship to sail

A star to guide her by

Let me orbit unknown worlds

A thousand miles high

- Emma Bull, "One Tall Ship"

Technomancers — and that includes Erhernauts — who ply the spaceways know that only one thing stands between you and the Void: a good solid Umbraship. Under optimum conditions, these vessels travel at unimaginable speeds and provide safe and (somewhat) comfortable lodgings for their crews. Even so, life on an Umbraship can be cramped, monotonous and sterile.

The Sons of Ether deal better with such problems than the practical-minded Void Engineers do; the Sons' ships resemble Victorian drawing rooms in space, with ample supplies of choice tobacco, comfy chairs, good books and magnificent gadgets to while away the time. Life-support machines are elegant and comprehensive. Ship designs range from pulp sci-fi rockets to archaic star-riggers. Whatever works.

The Engineers let their hair down considerably when away from the other Conventions (see "The Big Joke" in *Technocracy: Void Engineers*), but still remain bound to their own laws of mass and energy. With the logistics of Technocratic physics, there's not much room left for luxury. And, as any good Technocrat knows, a good scientist isn't *supposed* to need such comforts. Is it any wonder the Engineers enjoy pulling the wool over their comrades' eyes?

The alien craft of the Fallen and the Mad have no need for such rubbish; many of these Umbraships are alive in their own right, and maintain their "crews" as a large animal hosts its parasites. Although their living quarters are as decadent as their crews can make them, the Nephandi prefer twisted constructions of black metal and tattered gauze; their warped vessels combine the slick refinement of polished bone with the agonies of pulsating flesh — occasionally their own. Travelers who've met the Fallen Ones in space insist that they feed their Umbraships with their own blood and fluids, or channel their very souls to power its weapons. Such craft

sometimes take more than their due — they've been known to eat their own "masters" halfway through an engagement. Prisoners taken aboard Nephandi ships live long and sickening lives.

Marauders may not be more humane, but they do seem more refined. Their ships often hold a group delusion together by conforming to each crewman's hallucinations and providing common ground. Thus, a Marauder vessel might seem pieced together from bits of shipwreck, spacecraft, mansion and WWII fighter plane. Some theorists believe that the Bermuda Triangle and Sargasso Sea supply "spare parts" to shipbuilding Marauders. Living quarters aboard the Mad Ones' ships can be as well-appointed or as squalid as individual Marauders prefer. Many craft boast artwork that unhinges the sanity of those who see it from a distance — demented Jolly Rogers from hell.

These vessels are presented for maximum story potential and easy use. Some of the more refined ship equipment can be found in **Technocracy: Void Engineers**; most, however, is self-explanatory.

Ship Combat

Umbraship combat is best left to narrative storytelling; nothing gets in the way of a good space fight like a lot of chart-checking. The "rules" below aren't meant to be tactical simulations, but quick-and-dirty resolutions for tense situations. Feel free to complicate or ignore them as befits your own game.

- **Basic Rolls:** When rolls are necessary, like during a dogfight or pursuit, the Storyteller should have the helmsmen of both craft make resisted Wits + Piloting rolls (see the "Combat Maneuvers" Chart for difficulties). Whoever scores the most successes wins that turn. If both sides were trying to do damage, and both succeed, both ships are hit. For simplicity, don't split Dice Pools.

- **Multiple Gunners:** If an additional person controls the ship's guns, that character can make an additional Dexterity + Heavy Weapons or Wits + Pilot roll on the chart. Figure damage normally. For ships with a lot of guns, simply make one roll and add two more damage dice for each additional gunner firing at the target.

- **Hull Strength:** Ship hulls can take a number of "Health Levels" in damage before ripping open, and automatically soak a certain amount of the attacker's successes before damage is applied. Many ships have been treated with some sort of countermagickal procedures. Reduce any Effect thrown against them by the number of successes given.

- **Hull Damage:** A ruptured hull leads to all kinds of problems — explosive decompression often sucks debris and crewmen out the hole, and drains air from the damaged chamber. Attacks like tentacles, gunfire or magick can bypass the ship's armor and tear up the inside of the ship if they target the hole (+ 2 difficulty). Even Ether breathers suffer these hazards — imagine a hole in a ship at sea. Although player characters should be able to avoid the worst effects of a hull breach, the damage should add an element of urgency to a Deep Umbral fight.

Ship Combat Maneuvers

Attempt	Difficulty	Notes
Distant evasion	6	Leaves fight
Close evasion	8	Escapes pursuer
Pull "up"	9	Change course suddenly
Closing in	7	Gets you in tight
Ram	5	Crash!
Rend	6	Rip hull open
Unlock	8	Pull away from boarding
Strafe	8	Rake target with fire while passing
Blast	6	Shoot target
Dodge fire	8	Avoid being hit
Target breach		(+2 difficulty)
Long-range target		(+2 difficulty)

SES Nautilus and SES Argo (Ethernaut Cruisers)

Size: 30 yards, tip to tail-fin; 10-yard wing-span

Crew: Six (pilot, co-pilot, communications/sensors/navigation officer, engineer, two rear gunners); plus a 10-man hoarding party (or 10 passengers)

Armament: Two rear-mounted .50 caliber machine guns (8 dice damage, capable of seven full-auto bursts before requiring reload); two forward torpedo bays, each holding four Thunderbolt Torpedoes (16 dice damage). Both weapons are perfectly capable of damaging spirit targets.

Hull: Takes 10 Health Levels before rupture; subtracts five successes from most attacks, and three from magickal ones.

Special Equipment: These Umbraships are equipped with an Ephemeral-material Converter, allowing them to pass through the Barriers (the Gauntlet and the Horizon). From

eight dice, the engineer must generate 15 successes (difficulty 8). This is considered vulgar magick. The Converter is capable of absorbing 24 points of Paradox before shutting down or exploding. Such propulsion isn't necessary past the Horizon.

On the underside of each cruiser is a docking clamp. This can be used to secure the ship against an asteroid, or to board hostile vessels (see "Ram"). Once the clamp is secure, a cutting torch can be enabled, which does 12 dice damage.

Image: The sister-ships SES *Nautilus* and SES *Argo* are shaped like barbed arrowheads — two "sparrow" wings and a tail fin flaring out from a conical hull. One large engine fires from the rear. Each side has six round portholes, ringed in brass. The forward canopy is made of thick, telescopic glass. "The interior is furnished with mahogany bulk-heads and plush, red-velvet seats. A row of cabinets hold books, pipes, good brandy and changes of clothes. In the rear of the rocket, a large and well-furnished washroom attends the crew's baser needs.

Description: Modeled after the infamous Vernwell rocket of Horatio Savage, the SES *Nautilus* and SES *Argo* were designed by Professor Dubrius and constructed by many talented engineers. They were originally intended to patrol Etherspace around Victoria Station, and to protect that base from attack. Now they're more often used to transport Ethernauts between the station and Earth.

Newton Shuttlecraft

Size: The Newton shuttles are about 15 yards long by 10 yards wide by 8 yards high.

Crew: Anywhere from two to 15 individuals can cram into this small transport. Usually, at least two regular shuttle pilots occupy this type of vessel. Young Void Engineers often pull pilot duty as a training exercise, inevitably guided by an experienced Technician.

Armament: A Mark V laser cannon (10 dice of damage) juts from the belly of the shuttle, and is set on a rotating mount for maximum range of motion. The ship usually depends on its speed, high maneuverability and Mark 10 Mulcahy deflectors (five extra dice to soak damage) to escape conflict.

Hull: Takes six Health Levels before rupture; subtracts five successes from most attacks, and three from magickal ones. The Deflectors (above) grant it an additional five soak dice, which must be successfully rolled to deflect the damage.

Special Equipment: Each shuttle has at least one Quantum Field Inverter (see *Technocracy: Void Engineers*) with a variable setting, so that passengers can be Inverted to their Terran labs, to their labs in the Cop, or onto another, larger ship. Often wired for Gateway travel.

Image: Although an ovoid would probably be preferable, the designers of the Newton Shuttles were tired of the Void Engines they were used to. The shuttles are sleek and trim, but still have "windows," slight "wings," and a vaguely blocky sort of build, with some angular lines that make them look wildly different from most of the other ships of the Convention.

Description: When a regular shuttle service was created to ship instruments, Devices and some people from the Solar System to the Cop, the Research & Execution department was charged with the creative task of coming up with a new design. The new service was begun with the unveiling of the snazzy Newton Shuttles, and the vessels have done yeoman service ever since.

Greigen Test Platform

Size: A transforming vessel, the test platform is, in its spherical form, 200 yards in diameter. In its fullest unfolded state, it could be as long as 600 yards.

Crew: At least one Void Engineer pilot needs to be aboard one of these craft, and she usually needs about 50 Technicians to help her control the engines, motion and reformatting of the structure. The ship can carry up to 500 people comfortably.

Armament: You can mount just about anything you can imagine on this ship. One of the ships is being used as the test platform for an Entropic Field Generator Gun right now. The EFGG, a long, metallic tube, runs through the length of the ship. It fires a beam from the front of the ship that exponentially increases the innate Entropy of a target, doing damage to carefully ordered computer systems, weapon systems and living systems. From the rear of the weapon, another beam fires that exponentially *reduces* the innate Entropy of a target, which stops just about any process that fires the engines and the weapons systems, as well as causing damage to living systems. Both functions employ Entropy 4, with an "Arete" of 6,

Hull: Takes 12 Health Levels before rupture; subtracts eight successes from most attacks, and four from magickal ones.

Special Equipment: This ship type is designed to carry all sorts of special equipment. Use your imagination.

Description: Kristof Greigen created this vessel to carry large scale experiments into optimum positions for testing (preferably far, far away from any Constructs). The basic form of the craft is spherical, but that sphere can be reconfigured by the twisting, unfolding parts designed into it, letting it unfold, refold, twist, shift and rearrange as the primary research team might desire.

The Holocaust Brand (Nephandi Warship)

Size: *The Brand* is approximately 100 meters long, 50 meters wide and 25 meters high. No one has managed to acquire more accurate measurements.

Crew: A triumvirate of Malfean mages commands this vessel, each bringing a hand-picked entourage of at least 10 personal assistants, some lesser Nephandi, some fomori and an occasional Black Spiral Dancer werewolf. Under this elite corps, a crew of 50 or more fomori and mortal slaves work to navigate the vessel, maintain its function, and operate its weapon systems. Hundreds of Bane spirits flit

from place to place on the vessel, their duties varying with their power and influence in Malfeas. Periodically, *The Brand* conveys one of the direct representatives of the various Malfean Maeljin Incarna (see Book of the Wyrms) to some arcane meeting place, and thus also carries the enormous entourage such a personage would require.

A detachment of 50 to 100 elite fomori perform standard guard, torture and similar duties, and act as shock troops for boarding parties.

Armament: There are direct and indirect weapon systems. The direct weapons are powered by radioactive elementals and similarly toxic spirits. These guns and missiles do material damage to enemy vessels, and also provide foci for the Nephandi aboard to combine and utilize their Forces, Matter and Entropy Spheres,

The indirect weaponry envelops enemy bases and vessels with more emotional effects. Often jokingly referred to as the "Seven Deadlies' Ray," or "Pandora's Punishment," this spiritual attack employs Banes and Epiphings representing things like anger, avarice, pain and lust. Designed to be used in long-term settings at great distances, some of these weapons can be launched at a target in a probe or satellite that maintains the field. The target's residents slowly begin to experience the influence of these spirits. If the Nephandi can maintain the field long enough, the targets often self-destruct, at least internally, or convert to their cause.

For faster effect in a shorter term, the Nephandi can use these weapons as foci for their Mind and Life magick.

Hull: Takes 15 Health Levels before rupture; subtracts five successes from most attacks, and three from magickal ones.

Special Equipment: *The Brand* has an extremely effective cloaking Device that renders it undetectable to most magickal scanning Effects (Arete 6, Quintessence 35). This Device can be operated for long periods, and its running time is often extended by feeding it random low-powered Banes, similar spirits and prisoners.

The engines of *The Brand* are a monstrous conglomerate of Banes, forged in the pits of Malfeas. They continuously move the vessel through the Umbra with their combined spirit essence. This conglomerate feeds upon the agonies of the luckless individuals consigned to the torture chamber that occupies the underside of the ship,

Image: *The Brand's* outer hull is slick, shiny and black, as if coated with the chitin of millions of black beetles. Beneath that outer shell, white bones show through in spots, crossed, packed and bound in sinew and spider silk. The shape is roughly cigar-like, except for the bloated belly that swells out under the vessel like the distended abdomen of a starving child. The skin of the hull here bulges, shifts and moves with the agony of those within.

The interior of the vessel is a dripping, breathing mesh of pipelines, some of them acidic to the touch.



Corpses litter the floors or cling to the walls, and writhing things that might once have been human grind themselves into pulp under the gears of shrieking machines.

Description: *The Holocaust Brand* is one of the premier Mallean battle cruisers, certainly not the flagship of the fleet but a privileged command nevertheless. Dispatched for major attacks that require decisive victories or huge quantities of raw carnage, the ship is rarely used to its greatest potential. Once, it led an assault on the Copernicus Research Center, and since then has not been pressed nearly so hard. It occasionally makes morale-boosting appearances at major battles with Void Engineer or Son of Ether forces and has loomed in the background of several engagements near Neptune's moons.

The vessel's torture chamber is infamous as a place of punishment for disobedient servitors of Malfeas as well as hated enemies. The room echoes with screams and pleas at all hours of the day, which makes it a favored duty post among the fomori on board. Vampires, when they can be captured, make marvelous guests in *the Brand's* toy shop. Rumor has it that several Tzimisce vampires have signed on for tours of the torture chamber lasting a year and a day, simply for the experience of being subjected to the most jaded and imaginative torturers in existence.

The Vivo (Experimental Progenitor/Void Engineer Vessel)

Size: Roughly ovoid and about a kilometer in diameter through its largest axis.

Crew: Approximately 100 people staff the *Vivo*. The command crew consists of 10 Technocrats — live Progenitors and five Void Engineers -- which ensures a political balance of power aboard. The remaining crew are Technicians from the labs of both Conventions and marines dispatched from the staging area of Darkside Moonbase. The slight political edge the Void Engineers have by maintaining an enforcement contingent is offset by the fact that they don't really understand how the ship works. But then, it's doubtful whether the Progenitors know all of its ins and outs, either.

Armament: While the Progenitors work with the Void Engineers to develop more advanced weaponry, the *Vivo* at present has a number of explosive missile weapons that resemble thorns. The design is such that the thorn-missiles can be propelled at targets with a suitable detonation to accelerate them rapidly. On impact, the missiles explode; not a truly damaging explosion, but enough to transform the kinetic energy of the forward momentum into heat energy. The real damage comes



from the missile's contents, a flash-thawed acid concentrated enough to dissolve a hole through the hull of most targets with ease (10 die explosion, with an additional 8 Health Levels/turn done for five more turns).

Hull: Takes 20 Health Levels before rupture; subtracts six successes from most attacks, and five from magickal ones.

Special Equipment: A heavily guarded artifact of unknown origin has been installed on the *Vivo*. It makes instantaneous travel possible with minimal energy, but has one big drawback: It will transport only living objects. After some experiments and adjustments, recently living material such as hair, fingernails, wood and cotton also travels, but nothing inorganic or heavier than 300 pounds can be transported.

The first test run of this ship was a memorable experience, since the entire crew, in one of those weird cultural oversights, was wearing artificial fiber clothing. The artifact (which is classified to such an extent that even rumors of it are dangerous to hear) was supposedly found in the Cop. No more information — not size (although it has to fit on the *Vivo*, of course) nor appearance, nor guesses as to its origin or workings — is presently known, except to the select few who supervise its testing on the *Vivo*.

Image: The rippled, red-and-green-mottled surface of this ship seems to undulate as it moves. Seemingly random transparencies in the outer hull allow glimpses of strangely-colored shapes, foliage, circulatory systems, and the occasional crew member wandering around like an intestinal parasite. Great green vanes of an incredibly thin and tough material unfold from many parts of the ship and angle to catch and store energy from any available source of light.

Description: The *Vivo* is, as its name suggests, alive. (The name, apparently, is a rather obscure joke among some Progenitors, who evidently find it hilarious to inform their co-workers that they are going somewhere in *Vivo*.) It is, however, not a single living organism (although there are rumors of research being done in the Progenitor labs towards such a project) but rather *several* different living systems fused into a single floating ecosystem. The hull and energy vanes provide most of the energy for the interior systems, including the crew, through photosynthesis and related activities. The life support system is particularly complex in that it not only supplies air, water and recycling, but food and other resources as well. Of course, this gets out of hand sometimes (the orange tree in the command center was particularly troublesome), but the Progenitors report that they are "working on it."

The ship consists of many different living systems, including plant and animal complexes (not including the crew, that is), as well as other forms of life less well defined.

The systems that support the ship are modular; instead of having a single waste-recycling plant and a single

food-growing plant, there are hundreds of these scattered throughout the ship, none of which are identical. The diversity of the systems actually adds to the stability of the ecosystem as a whole (although it does cause a somewhat chaotic and complicated layout) and to the ship's ability to deal with the differing needs of its crew. If, for example, the weapons systems are needed, the systems that deal with the waste products of the weapons array experience a growth boom in order to deal with the increased output.

The drawback to having the systems arranged this way is that the ship is, in the words of one of the Void Engineers, "even less predictable than usual." The ship's systems do not necessarily deal with the same stressor in the same way twice, and systems not directly connected with one another sometimes interact in odd ways. One of the most unfortunate of these interactions happened

early on, when it was discovered that one of the systems used for fine maneuvering of the ship emitted a gas which caused the membranes of the "windows" to weaken (a situation that was quickly remedied). The term "bugs in the system" also took on an entirely new meaning after the Progenitors had to deal with an infestation of Japanese Beetles which thought the hull very tasty. The Progenitors hope they can "fully integrate" the systems eventually, with the ultimate goal of making the ship self-replicating.

The *Vivo* itself is surely a wonder of achievement, based as it is solely on living systems, and powered entirely by light and a small amount of Tass. Self-contained, efficient, potentially self-replicating, but, it is hoped, *not* self-aware, the *Vivo* is the heart of its creators' hopes for what the future could bring.



Appendix: Game Systems

*So many worlds, so much to do.
So little done, such things to be.*
—Lord Tennyson

Travel To and Fro



In game terms, travel between worlds is possible, but requires certain powers. Before you go, it's always good to know how you're getting to your destination. Systems have been offered here for those who might want them, but they're not essential to running a story in the Otherworlds. Remember-- imagination is everything.

Perception:

Anyone with the Awareness Trait, the Dream Background or any of the magickal Spheres can perceive the Periphery simply by using those abilities. Rank One

Sphere perceptions offer a slight glimpse into the "between," while the other Traits help him tap the feelings that come with increased awareness. Vampiric Auspex (Level Two and up) "skirts into" this extraordinary state, as does fae enchantment. (Changelings themselves (along with shapeshifters and ghosts) already exist in the Periphery by nature of what they are.

As for seeing *through* the Periphery, the Spirit Sphere lets you to gaze straight through the Gauntlet itself. Several Garou Gifts allow a shapeshifter to do the same. Rank One Mind magick (or various "aura perception" powers that other beings have) grant the character glimpses of the Astral Umbra; only by crossing over through astral travel, however, can she see it in all its glory.

Beginning the Journey

Any character who enters the Otherworlds starts in the Penumbra, the shadow of our own world. (A portal lets you skip that part, but we won't complicate things right now.) From there, she must walk or fly into the mists which surround where she stands. Her intentions and knowledge lead her where she wants to go.

The Penumbra always appears to be in twilight, filled with foggy haze. During the day, this haze lightens and colors become more vivid; at night, the moon provides the strongest light and the shadows take on a near-life of their own. By day, the worldwalker must rely on her own instincts (Wits + Cosmology or Perception + Enigmas), spiritual assistance or luck to find her way around. As night falls, trails called Airts or Moon Paths stretch out before her. These paths lead to all the various Realms, although the trip to some of them may be long and difficult.

A character who wants to fly can do so if she has the power; this often involves magick, wings or some device. Many Astral travelers can glide naturally. A flying traveler can look down on the world from a distance, and may encounter paths to worlds that a walker couldn't reach, like the Aetherian Reaches in Chapter Two. Unless she does, though, she remains in the Penumbra.

Astral travelers may interact with spirit travelers in the Middle Umbra. Those who wander through Spirit magick may enter the lowest reaches of the High Umbra (the Vulgate), but may not advance farther. Spirit beings deal with everyone normally. The exception is the Low Umbra; without certain Gifts or magicks, the living cannot affect the Shadowlands, and spirits of the dead cannot cross into the other two Umbrae.

- **Disconnection:** The Three Worlds represent what humans once had, but lost. Technomancers (including Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts) have a very hard time even reaching Umbral Realms; they tend to wander around in the mists, going nowhere unless someone more knowledgeable leads them to a destination. They cannot attain the Aetherial Reaches *ever*, and have a difficult time entering the Afterworlds described in Chapter One.

Explorers without shapeshifter blood eventually lose their connection to the Earth if they stay in the Umbra for long. After a while (one to four months for most people, four months to a year for primal mysticks), they forget their lives on Earth and become spirits. Their physical bodies fall away (or die, in the case of astral travelers) and their consciousness shifts them into spirits which embody their true nature. This is a one-way process. Umbrood like Aelida are said to have begun their existence as mortals who fled the material plane. The same disconnection affects the changing breeds as well, but it takes longer, typically one to five years. (No, vampires who drink werewolf blood do not gain this resistance. Disconnection

affects them as it would any other mortal.) People who dwell in Horizon Realms don't suffer this effect, but gradually take on the aspects of the Realm in which they live, and they shape that Realm in return.

Magick and Combat

As the Mage rulebook says (page 242), all magick is coincidental in the Umbra. Time and Forces magick work at +1 difficulty, and Life and Matter generally don't apply to things you find there. Spirit magick makes the caster shine like a beacon, and acts as Life against spirits and Matter against ephemeral objects. A mage with Spirit 3 or better can also touch an Umbrood entity, which other mortals can't do (shapechangers and changelings are exceptions to this rule, but vampires are not. Unless they're in Frenzy. How odd...).

Mortals suffer an automatic +1 to all their attack difficulties in the Umbra; shapeshifters are the exception to this rule, being largely spirit themselves. For more details, see Mage, page 261.

Correspondence magick is tricky; it won't cross through portals, gates or Realms, but it can shift around the Penumbra, or around the Realm you occupy. "Teleportation" and co-location is really dangerous — fewer than three successes, and you end up wherever the Storyteller feels like putting you! Entropy is deadly in the Shadowlands. Those rules can be found in Chapter Three.

Realms are little worlds unto themselves; the guidelines above do not apply inside them. Many Realms have their own rules, and the systems section of each chapter detail those rules. Most Realms have their own versions of what is and what is not considered "coincidental magick." Horizon Realms are notorious for realities "slanted" to favor their creators.

Stepping sideways in a Realm is often useless — there's no "spirit world" on the other side. Really advanced Spirit magick (Spirit 5) can get a mage through the pericarp, or Realm Gauntlet, allowing her to exit the Realm without using a portal. This brings the traveler into the "space between worlds," just outside the Realm itself. Passing through a pericarp this way requires at least three successes at difficulty 8. A botch seals the wizard *inside* the pericarp, where she must be freed by someone else.

- **Magickal Difficulties:** Many Realms can alter the difficulties for certain Spheres by their very nature. These adjustments can be found in the sections for each chapter, and will not affect the overall difficulty by more than 4 points (+/-4), total. Ten is the maximum difficulty in all cases, and 2 the minimum difficulty. Certain feats might be automatically successful in the right Realm (creating butterflies in the Verbena Seasonal Realms, for instance) if the mage has a high enough Dice Pool, at the Storyteller's option.

Travel in the Three Worlds

Pop Goes the Wizard!

—Dr. Volcano

Entering the High Umbra

To pass into the Realms of the mind, a traveler must leave her body and advance her consciousness. Entering the Astral world requires either outside assistance, Spirit 3, Mind 4 or 5, Auspex 5, the Garou Astral Mind Gift, or the Psychic Numina of Clairvoyance,

Explorers who enter the High Umbra through Astral projection travel nude by default; no material items (with the exception of certain Talismans) can become one with the traveler's essence. A mental link, often called a silver cord, connects the traveler to her body back home (**Mage**, page 211, or **Vampire**, pages 160-161). Those who enter physically through portals, or who become ephemeral through Spirit magick, can carry or wear anything they want. No silver cord binds them.

Stepping sideways will get you in, hut only so far. Many Umbral travelers whose minds tend toward abstract reasoning (like Technocrats, Virtual Adepts, Sons of Ether, Hermetic mages and Akashic Brothers) see the Penumbra with Astral Videre, but cannot venture beyond the Vulgate with Spirit magick alone. Only a highly developed mind can reach the upper Realms. Although some portals go directly to the Courts, the highest Realms are beyond Spirit magick's reach.

To travel beyond the Vulgate, the explorer must concentrate on changing her level of being. As she does so, her body becomes a shimmering mass of colors and shapes, weaving patterns which grow more complex as she enters higher states. From there, she sends her body up the Spires, metaphysical symbols for higher consciousness that appear like towers, mountains or stairs. In game terms, this involves rolling Perception + Occult, with difficulties ranging from 6 to 10. Reaching the Epiphamies (the highest Realms) demands a mental shift to Intelligence + Occult, with the difficulties going higher as the character's consciousness ascends; the lower Epiphamies demand difficulty 9, and the outer reaches go beyond mortal thought. Only a mage who has ascended can reach the most theoretical astral reaches, and the trip might be beyond many of them. (See the Mind Sphere in the Mage rulebook, or the listings for Auspex or Numina in Vampire or Hunters Hunted, respectively, for the rules of Astral travel.)

Entering the Middle Umbra

Stepping sideways through innate power, Gifts, Spirit magick, or its variant, Dimensional Science, brings the explorer to the Middle Umbra. As we've already said, what she sees when she gets there depends on her mindset; her body, however, stands in the Penumbra, along with any-

thing she brought with her. Passing through is easier when you wear or carry nothing (Mage, page 217), but whatever you bring enters with you.

From there, travel simply involves walking. The paths one takes, though, become pretty arcane. Most are guarded by hostile Umbrood, blocked by spirit-webbing, or move of their own accord. Moon Paths, the easiest routes, are glowing roads that link the Realms. Those who walk such paths must deal with the Lunes (see Chapter Six) and other hazards. Other roads, called Airts, mark the places where spirits travel. Airts are hard to find without help, but connect all Middle Realms. An adventurous traveler can try to climb the Pattern Webs which link every location in the Middle World. This is dangerous—Pattern Spiders swarm across such Webs—and can get you hopelessly lost.

Navigating through the Middle Worlds involves either Perception + Enigmas (for shapeshifters) or Wits + Cosmology (for everyone else). Difficulties seem tied to the phases of the Moon; when it's full, Moon Paths glow everywhere; the smaller it appears, the weaker the moonlight and the more difficult the journey. Moon Paths disappear completely during daytime. Mages still ponder why this is.

Entering the Lower World

The easiest way to cross into the Land of the Dead is to die. Since this tends to be a one-way trip, the **Agama Sojourn** (Entropy 4/Life 2/Spirit 3) spell may separate the spirit from the body, allowing the traveler to "die" while her body remains between life and death. (A similar Effect, commonly practiced by the Euthanatos, sends another person on an agama sojourn. This variant is Entropy 4/Life 3/Spirit 4.) An agama is risky magick at best; many dangers await the successful voyager, and a failed roll makes the trip permanent.

Agama magick can only carry a mage as far as the Shadowlands, the Low Penumbra. Traveling further requires a ghostly guide (preferably with the Argos Arcanos) and a willingness to literally risk your soul for the trip. Chapter Three describes the journey in detail.

Entering Other Realms

- Most Horizon Realms, Shade Realms and Shard Realms have portals linking them to the mortal world. Crossing through these gateways and Anchorheads may involve complex rituals, certain circumstances, or simply walking through, depending on where the portal is and where it goes. Magick is often unnecessary.

- Paradox Realms open for you. Getting to one deliberately is more difficult. Sometimes, a spirit traveler can step sideways and follow a Paradox spirit's trail—its Airt—back home. This begins at difficulty 8 and goes up from there; knowing the nature of the spirit (Spirit Lore) can reduce that difficulty by -1 to -3. Those who study

Paradox Realms claim that you can reach them by passing outside the Horizon and searching for their silvery trails. New Paradox Realms float close to the Earth, while old ones drift into deep space. Getting in is easy — just step through the membranous surface. Getting out requires clever magick. Using the same Sphere that brought the Realm into being is not wise. Funny thing — when you escape a Paradox Realm, you return directly to Earth. *Where* you return to depends on the length of the trip and the wishes of the Storyteller.

- The Dreaming: Traveling the Maya is as mysterious as the Realm/Zone itself. Changelings and their enchanted allies dwell in a sort of "dream Penumbra" which corresponds to the normal Penumbra but looks considerably different — it's a vital world which mixes the best and worst aspects of the Middle Umbra and traditional folk tales. The fae call this the Near Dreaming and Dreamspeakers call it the Dreamtime. While mages can see it with Mind 1/Spirit 1, non-Dreamspeakers cannot "travel" there without being enchanted by fae magic. The fae themselves can travel the trods at will — the Dreaming, in many ways, is their home.

From there, paths called trods lead to the Maya, the Dream Realms which changelings call the Far Dreaming. Here, floating bits of imagination — called Dream Realms for lack of a better word — create the worlds imagined by sleeping minds. Mind 3 allows a mage to enter these places, but *everyone* goes there while asleep. Mind magick simply allows the explorer to choose where she goes, and for how long. Wits + Enigmas rolls can guide the trip. When dreamwalking, the mage's body remains alive, as if she were using astral travel (see above) without a silver cord. Only Dreamspeakers may step sideways and travel to the Far Dreaming, although powerful ones may bring other people with them.

By most accounts, the Maya bleeds outside of the Horizon, blending into a hazardous eternity at the fringe of the Far Dreaming. Trods are generally the only way to travel this far, although it's rumored that people in comas or Quiet mindscapes send their minds here. Only Dreamspeakers, changelings and their allies, or astral travelers may come and go here under their own power, and it's a hazardous journey. Navigation difficulties range from 9 to 10. Travelers who lose their way end up devoured by Night Terrors (Chapter Six) or wander around in their own imaginations for eternity.

- The Hollow Earth: Most explorers reach this Realm by mistake. Many of the known passages — including caves beneath the Andes, a plateau in India and a tributary of the Amazon River — have been blocked off, except for one cave at the North Pole. That's not to say that a lost group in some primordial area won't find a *new* entrance into these Lost Worlds, but doing so doesn't require any special magicks. Just luck.

Travel Beyond the Horizon

Despite the Fisher Princess' remarks in Chapter Five, the Horizon is an impressive barrier. All travelers perceive it differently: some see a huge river or a "Dreamshell," others a living membrane coursing with creation's blood, and still others an endless wall of iron. Most Etherjammers see a belt of cosmic rays, which their shins must navigate without disaster. Either way, a traveler passing through the Great Barrier must ford the Horizon (often with Spirit 5 or Mind 5, but sometimes by sheer Willpower) with 10 or more successes on an extended roll. Getting back in usually demands 15 more successes the same way. An Anchorhead vortex Domain makes the passage easier (five successes only).

Anchorheads link the Near Umbra with the Void. Some also pass into the Shade Realms or Shenti. Most Anchorheads appear to be energy storms or whirlpools, but some of the more well-traveled ones — gateways to the Shade Realms — take a more permanent form as landscapes on the far side of some obstacle. The Anchorhead to Life's Shade Realm, for example, might look like a moss-covered log bridge across a bottomless chasm. On the other side, a vast grassland awaits those brave enough to cross over. The character makes her roll as she balances across the log bridge. Characters who cross through an Anchorhead need only make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to finish the trip.

The Aetherian Reaches (Chapter Two) offer an easier path to the Deep Umbra, but only the most primal travelers — shapeshifters, Verbena, Dreamspeakers, Cultists of Ecstasy and some changelings — can even *find* this spirit Realm. Past the cloud-cover of certain Middle Umbral Realms, the sky goes up forever, passing up to the Horizon and beyond. The planets one sees from this perspective arc more like the Shade Realms than like the Shards we recognize. Here, the traveler needs only five successes on a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to pass through. Anchorhead vortices, which sweep across the "sky," lead directly to the Shenti, which epitomize Wyrms, Weaver or Wyld.

Once in space, the traveler's perceptions guide her journey (Perception + Cosmology). Most modern-educated mages understand that space is an airless vacuum; a worldwalker has to fly to cross it, and the distances are vast. Some primal mysticks, however, can simply picture an endless desert and *walk* across the Void. To others, the explorer's still floating, but in the traveler's mind, she wanders through a vast expanse, waiting for some landmark. This kind of journey can take *lifetimes*, and has its own problem—survival.

The deeper one goes into the Void, the more pressing the need for magical protection grows. Imagine drifting in the Pacific ocean—sure, you can breathe for a while, but how long will you last? A mystick Talisman or Device may protect the traveler for a while, but she'll die out there without something

more to sustain her. The Void, moreover, exerts a more subtle threat than simple physical starvation: dissolution of the soul.

The Void's spiritual vacuum pulls slowly but insistently at a traveler's essence. As she wanders, her soul begins to scatter. Unless some magick, like the rank five Spirit Effect Deep Umbral Travel or a technomagickal life-support system, keeps her body and soul together, the two gradually drift apart and disintegrate. For some reason, Marauders and Nephandi seem immune to this effect. (The Fallen Ones' exile past the Horizon was supposed to kill them. It didn't.) The aforementioned safeguards will protect an explorer indefinitely; still, most Etherjammers prefer to ride on some kind of Umbraship, if only for security.

The Void houses some unpleasant company. A mighty effort by the Traditions and Technocracy combined ripped the most powerful Nephandi from the Earth in 1944, killing many of them and hurling the survivors into the Deep Umbra. Another working locked the metaphysical door behind them, making it impossible for the Fallen Masters to breach the Horizon directly. Since then, the Nephandi have had to sneak in through back doors and dreams, or corrupt new followers. Most cosmologists feel the ritual dropped the Fallen Ones into Malfeas (see Chapter Five), but no one's been able to check. The Marauders seem to prefer living outside the Tellurian's confines; even so, many of them enjoy jumping some harmless worldwalker or Umbraship when the opportunity presents itself.

And then there are the *things*.... Occasionally called "Demon Hordes" by explorers, the entities that dwell on the endless stars and planets are far too frightening for mere statistics to convey. Besides, the idea's already been done to perfection, so why bother when a perfectly good game called *Call of Cthulhu* already exists? Chapter Six presents a few denizens of the Void Beyond. If you, the Storyteller, want to get more sadistic, check out *CoC*.

Travel Between Realms

Astral traveling from the High Umbra or the Dream Zone to another World requires a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) to make the necessary shift in consciousness. Doing so places the explorer in the mists of the Penumbra. She must travel from there herself.

A Middle Umbra traveler can climb the Pattern Web into the lower reaches of the Vulgate (or vice versa), but cannot advance further than that. Only the Dreamspeakers can walk from the Dreaming into the Umbra, Coming or going from the Lands of the Dead into the High or Middle Umbra requires Entropy 5/Spirit 4, Entropy 5/Mind 5 for an Astral traveler, or Argos 4 in the case of a wraith.

Portals are usually the only way out of Horizon or Umbral Realms—very few Realms have Gauntlets you can step sideways through, and it's almost always easier to get in than to get out. Most Horizon Realms have back doors into other Realms or onto Moon Paths, but these are usually guarded by elaborate wards and sentinel creatures.

Travel Methods

Place

Periphery

Astral Travel

Stepping Sideways

High Umbra

Middle Umbra

Low Umbra

Realms

Paradox Realm

Maya

Hollow World

Horizon

Anchorhead and Aetherian Reaches

Deep Umbra

World to World

Means of Travel and Navigation

Awareness, Dream, Rank One Spheres, Auspex 2

Mind 4 or 5, Auspex 5, Clairvoyance 5, Gifts; navigate by Perception + Occult

Spirit 3 (4 to bring others), Gifts (innate to Garou); navigate by Perception + Enigmas (shapeshifters) or Wits + Cosmology (mages)

Astral travel, stepping sideways (Vulgate only); navigate by Perception + Occult, or Intelligence + Occult (Epiphamies)

Stepping sideways, astral travel

Entropy 4/Life 2/Spirit 3; navigate by Wits + Occult

Portals, gates or Anchorheads

Find (Perception + Spirit Lore), step through

Mind 1/Spirit 1, or fae enchantment to see; sleep, Mind 3 to visit (only Dreamspeakers can step sideways); navigate by Wits + Enigmas

No magick necessary

Spirit 5, Mind 5, or Willpower roll (10 successes out, 15 successes in)

Willpower roll (5 successes, difficulty 8)

Spirit 5, Mind 5, Life 3, or life-support device for long survival; navigate by Perception + Cosmology.

High Umbra/Dream Zone to other: Willpower roll (difficulty 8);

Middle to High Umbra: climb Pattern Web (Dexterity + Athletics or Cosmology); Low to any: Entropy 5/Spirit 4, Entropy 5/Mind 5 for an Astral traveler, or Argos 4; Realm to Realm: Portals and gates.

Systems, Chapter by Chapter



For all intelligent human beings have had some brief experience of moments of contemplation, when consciousness seems to widen and become aware of the sheer interest and complexity of the world. And when you are in this state, you cease to feel the same intense desire for individuals or objects, because you are aware of so many.

— Colin Wilson, *Poetry & Mysticism*

Chapter One

- **General Notes:** Remember that astral travelers use their Social and Mental Traits in place of their Physical ones: Dexterity becomes Wits, Manipulation becomes Strength, and Stamina becomes Intelligence. Damage is subtracted from Willpower instead of Health, and when a character's Willpower drops to zero, his silver cord snaps.

When and if the silver cord is severed, a character loses all connection to his body and flies upward to the Epiphamies. This is usually a good time to take the player aside and run him through a series of quick sensory impressions, then go back to the others while he puzzles out what's happened. For further details about astral travel, see the Mage (page 211) and/or Vampire (pages 160-161) rulebooks.

The Realms

- **The Grand Hall of Endless Gates:** All forms of magick are coincidental here, but supernatural beings (including werewolves, vampires and such) add +2 difficulty to their "casting" rolls when they try to use a Discipline, Sphere, Gift, or whatever.

The doors and windows to the various Realms operate both ways, but you have to see them in order to use them. Many Grand Hall portals cannot be noticed from the other side except with a Perception + Awareness or Perception + Enigmas roll (difficulty 8). When seen this way, they often link up to some other kind of "transition place" (a mirror, pool, gate, crossroads, etc.). A magickal or mundane lock will bar the portal for a little while, but will be swept away by the sentinels in time.

As for the sentinels themselves, consider them a plot hook, not a "wandering monster." They should seem mysterious, unknowable and invincible. Any character who attacks one should be dealt with in a harsh but non-fatal manner (turned to stone, hurled out a nearby door, frozen in mid-air, etc.). The sentinels never speak.

- **The Inventium:** All forms of technomagick are coincidental in this Realm; natural Arts are vulgar unless they're really subtle (making a seed fertile, flipping a coin out of probability's range, etc.).

The Realm's "native" inventions here work under their own power, and never require fuel, power or ammunition. Devices from outside have their usual needs. Everything here is "solid"; that is, it's made of matter and natural elements, not ephemera, so long as it remains inside the Realm. Visitors cannot take items from the Inventium with them; once an item passes out of the place, it turns to dust.

The people living here should seem stark and insular. Years of hiding in what amounts to a giant toybox has made them all pretty crazy, especially the ones who were born here. Everyone in the Realm expects an army of invaders from Earth to come any time now and take the inventions away from them. Visitors, even allies, will be given a cool (or even hostile) reception.

- **The Elemental Domains:** Nature magicks (including magick with no focus at all) are coincidental. A spell involving elements in its focus reduces its casting difficulty by -1. All technomagickal Effects are considered vulgar. All Forces and Matter-related Effects reduce their difficulties by an additional -1 (maximum modifier +/-4).

Spirit and matter are one and the same in the elemental domains. All Spheres work as usual, and the surroundings are not made of ephemera. All elemental spirits are considered Materialized (as the Charm) in these Realms.

All of the elemental Courts are dangerous to travelers who aren't equipped to handle extreme climates. Vampires in the Fire Courts are not long for this (or any other) world. Characters in their astral forms will remain unharmed but uncomfortable — the domains can be pretty unsettling. A bit of planning (magickal or otherwise) can prepare worldwalkers to survive the Courts, but the traveler who simply wanders into the home of Hon So the Wooden Dragon without an invitation had better be prepared for some nasty surprises.

- **Umbrood Realms** (including the Umbral Courts): All forms of mystick magick (that is, magick that looks like magick) are coincidental; the spirits are old-fashioned and consider technomagick a vulgar aberration ("That thing won't work in *my* home, child!"). Some technology-spirits may be the exception to this rule, but most Umbrood Realms reject Technocratic ways. Magick casting difficulties are:

Coincidental: Sphere + 2

Vulgar without witnesses: Sphere + 3

Vulgar with witnesses: Sphere + 4

The residents of these Realms are as weak or as powerful as you want to make them. The Book of Madness offers some sample characters to give you an idea about the relative power of the Umbral Court's denizens. Such spirits are almost always haughty and condescending toward humans, but tend

to be extraordinarily curious about them, too. They often insist on ceremony, and get badly bent out of shape if they don't receive the proper respect. Umbrood often have more subtle ways of dealing with annoyances than simple combat; Lady Aelida is more likely to summon a flock of birds to crap on a trespasser or to fling him off her cloud-castle than she is to jump on him and start swinging.

- **The Nether Realms:** Characters cannot exit either of the Afterworlds easily; they must leave the way they came in, or through some other portal like the Catacombs or the Dread River. Spirit 5 will not get you out of the heavens or hells. Mortals can visit the Afterworlds only by preparing themselves for the trip, or by following some demon or angel back home (not an easy task).

All forms of magick are considered vulgar with witnesses throughout the Nether Realms. (What? You thought you could just march in and start slinging spells? Sorry, buddy, this is hell.) Holy magicks—Chorus Songs, healings, shamanic medicine, etc. — are especially hard to perform in the hells (+1 difficulty), but people with True Faith and blessed Talismans add two extra dice to all their Dice Pools and glow with searing light. Which, of course, makes them good targets....

Paradox points don't just pile up on a character sheet. They hurt. A lot. Backlashes take the form of Infernal tortures, but will not kill the victim, only cause him pain (-1 to all Dice Pools for every five points of Paradox expended). Escape through Quiet is not an option. A mage is stuck with the consequences of his actions.

Infernal chains, shackles and cells cannot be moved or broken with mortal strength. It takes a Dice Pool of at least 10 dice to resist such blocks or bindings, and breaking or moving these obstacles usually demands at least three successes.

For each day spent wandering in the Nether Realms, a character loses one of her permanent Willpower points. Lesser visits cost two temporary points. Anyone killed in the Nether Realms is trapped there, possibly forever, and joins the ranks of the tormented.

Demons aren't stupid, as a rule. Dumb servitors may hurl themselves at an invader, trying to bring her down by sheer force, but the smarter ones will mutter enigmatic phrases, display minor feats of power, and try to get on the character's good side. In short, they play games. These Infernal pastimes can be a great deal more fun than simply beating the stuffing out of a trespasser, and they have the same result. The explorer may leave hell alive one day, but she'll remember what she's seen for the rest of her life. And who knows? She may well be back....

- **Paradise:** All peaceful magicks are considered coincidental here, and do not require a focus regardless of the mage's Arete. All violent or offensive Effects are vulgar with witnesses, and all Paradox for such attacks is doubled. A Paradox backlash expels the whole group from the Realm.

There's only one way into the Paradise Realm: through the front door. No portals, Null Zone corridors or Pattern Webs lead here, and the only other way out is by offending the hosts.

Any character stupid enough to attack the Gates of Heaven is annihilated. Period. It doesn't matter if he has a True Brujah grandfather, an Arete of 10 and sixes in all his Spheres. The light engulfs him and he's gone forever. Nearby travelers get a chance to run; they'll only suffer three aggravated Health Levels (no soak, even with Fortitude), be struck blind for several days, and suffer an eternal mark on their foreheads and souls for what they've been a party to. Travelers who wish to profane Paradise once they're inside — through violence, insults, vandalism, whatever — can do as they wish. When they finish whatever it is they wanted to do, the Realm fades around them and they find themselves in hell. Getting out is their problem — after all, rejecting Paradise was their choice. A character who suffers this fate may not ever return to Paradise unless he offers a sincere repentance.

A visit to Paradise restores all the Willpower (temporary or otherwise) a visitor has lost, and grants her a new point as well (maximum 10). Such trips, however, are rare and wondrous experiences. A person would be extraordinarily lucky to do this once in her entire life, and two trips would be almost unheard of. The angels and resident souls are kind and peaceful — not perfect, perhaps, but innocent and well-intentioned. At the same time, those imperfections make Paradise seem that much more hopeful.

The storytelling elements of a journey to Paradise cannot be overemphasized — that journey must be one of the most dramatic and significant chapters in your chronicle. The same is true, to a lesser extent, of a trip to hell. The Nether Realms lie closer to the World of Darkness than the heavens do, however, so it's easier to travel more than once to the Infernal depths than to the Celestial reaches.

- **The Epiphamies:** These are all Realms of pure Mind; no other form of magick, Gift or Discipline will work here at all. Mind powers reduce their difficulties by -2, and are considered coincidental magick.

A character should have fours or better in all of her Mental Traits to even consider coming here, and some of the really abstract Realms are simply off-limits. Stepping sideways is not an option in the Epiphamies; worldwalkers must visit in their astral forms. Especially rare Null Zone corridors *might* lead a material visitor to one of the highest Realms, but he'll have to leave the way he came in.

An astral wanderer who ends up flung into the Epiphamies when her silver cord gets cut buzzes around the netherspace. She may cross into the more common Realms (like those described), but cannot stay anywhere for long. Unless she finds a way home, she becomes an Umbral vagabond, looking for a Realm or fellow traveler that can reunite her with her Earthly body.

Chapter Two

- General Notes: Most mages never see the Realms of the Middle World; they're too shut off from the primal essence of nature to go far in these elemental regions. Those who stay in touch with nature, however, like Cultists, Verbena, Euthanatos and especially Dreamspeakers, find there's a fascinating and intoxicating play going on behind the Velvet Curtain.

This is, of course, the Umbra described in the Werewolf books. Many of the Realms depicted in that game's supplement Umbra! The Velvet Shadow, like Wolfhome, Pangaea and the tribal homelands, are virtually impossible for non-Garou to reach. Other Realms are seen quite differently by non-Garou visitors. The names and descriptions of each Realm have been changed a bit to reflect the perceptual shift. For the record, the Realms are as follows: The Aetherian Reaches = the Aethetial Realm; the Chasm = the Abyss; Dystopia = the CyberRealm; Hy-Brasil = Arcadia Gateway; the Mythic Worlds = tribal homelands and the Battleground; the Radiance = the Flux; and the Wasteland = an overlap of the Atrocity Realm and the Scar. Storytellers are advised to send mixed parties to one variation or the other. The Hollow Earth (Chapter Three) may be an aspect of Pangaea! but no one has been able to prove a connection.

Technomagick is vulgar in all Middle Umbral Realms except Dystopia; there, the reverse is true. Paradox backlashes usually summon spirits to "correct" the problem. These entities aren't necessarily Paradox spirits, but simply Umbrood defending their territory.

The spirits themselves respect any mage with the Spirit Sphere; the higher his rating, the higher their regard. This doesn't mean they'll do everything he asks — they might hate him for having powers mortals shouldn't possess — but they'll notice him and grant everything he does with a measure of importance. As for other characters, the reception spirits give them might range from amusement to hatred, depending on the spirit, the character, and the things both sides do when they meet.

Umbral Storms

The Middle Worlds are the most tempestuous of the three layers. Although mass insanities may trigger storms in the High Umbra, and maelstroms may sweep across the Underworld, the stresses of Wyld, Weaver and Wyrms alike rip across the Middle Umbra in the form of frequent Umbral Winds and Umbraquakes.

The Umbral Wind brings storms which resemble Earthly tempests, but in a far more horrifying aspect. They're the elemental essence of storms, more violent and awe-inspiring than hurricanes. Imagine being out on a small boat in the middle of an ocean when a waterspout hundreds of feet high bears down on you. Nowhere to run, no shelter in sight. That's the terror of an Umbral storm.

In game terms, an Umbral Windstorm changes the landscape drastically in its wake. It disrupts Moon Paths, blows travelers off course, and throws a hefty scare into everyone. If characters end up in the middle of such a storm, have them make Stamina rolls (difficulty 6-9, depending) to see how well they come through. Failure means a person is swept away and gets hurt (one to three Health Levels). Botching injures her badly (three to five Health Levels) and strands her far away. Success means she's shaken but unhurt.

Umbraquakes occur when a powerful spirit gets really angry. Everyone in the vicinity gets thrown to the ground and injured by the spiritual outburst. This usually inflicts one to five dice in aggravated damage to everyone in the area, and shakes the surrounding Umbrascape to bits.

Zones

- Maya: See Chapter Three.
- Digital Web: See Mage, pages 242-244. For real detail, see the Digital Web supplement.
- Mirror Zone: As the Storyteller, invoke any rules change you want in order to throw the players off balance. Possibilities include turning successful rolls into botches, adding Paradox to successful magick rolls, exchanging Wits + Enigmas rolls for any other form of roll, and anything else your demented little mind can envision.
- Null Zone: No form of technology works at all in the Null, nor does any form of magic, including Arts, Disciplines, Spheres, Gifts or Arcanoi. Werecreatures can shift into their other forms, but that's about it. Yes, these are, in fact, aspects of the Paths of the Wyck, and they're fairly deserted. Some Realms transcend these corridors, but for the most part, the Null goes almost everywhere. Getting there is easy — just step through the door (if you can find one). Stepping sideways while concentrating on the Null can get you there (difficulty 10); failure strands the character elsewhere, and a botch pretty much destroys him, so it's not a good idea to try.

Time effectively stands still for characters in these halls; a group could walk from London to Maui in a few moments if they knew where to go. Navigating the Null corridors requires an Intelligence + Enigmas roll, difficulty 10. Getting to an exact destination requires five successes; botching the roll leads the characters to some hideous doom (a hell, the Chasm, etc.).

- Vistas: Nothing a worldwalker can do will affect a Vista in any way, or vice versa. Characters are spectators, nothing more. Vistas often require that each viewer makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 10 minus the viewer's Arete, Gnosis, Courage or GEamour). Failure means that character loses a point of temporary Willpower. A botch means she loses two points. Interestingly, wraiths are unaffected by Vista visions. Maybe what they've already seen is so much worse that simple visions don't bother them.

The Realms

- **Aethenan Reaches:** As mentioned, this place is so alien to (or so guarded against) Technomancers that they can never enter it. If someone leads them here, they end up lost somewhere else. All forms of mystic magick are coincidental, though Paradox still exists for those who botch. Spirit magicks reduce casting difficulties by -1. Garou characters gain an automatic Rage point when they enter the Realm.

To get to the Reaches, a traveler must go up somehow. Once she does, no matter how high she goes, she remains immune to the effects of high altitudes or outer space (except for weightlessness) until she reaches the Horizon. Once here, she may walk on clouds as if they were solid; if she falls, she will not be hurt (she might be really freaked out, but not injured, after a really long plunge).

- **The Chasm:** All forms of magick are vulgar here, and Effects add +1 to their difficulties. The Chasm is a siphon of mystick energies and disrupts any attempt to use them. The exception is Spirit magick; any pure Spirit Effect (that is, one which uses that Sphere only) is coincidental and reduces its difficulty by -1. Spirits summoned here, however, will be very angry—a visit to the Chasm is considered a virtual death sentence.

Anything (or anyone) who falls into the Chasm is lost forever. Scaling the walls requires a Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 6 or more), while descending the path may demand Dexterity + Athletics rolls to avoid slipping. Anyone who stares into the Chasm must make a Willpower roll (difficulty is Storyteller's option) to look away. All visitors, regardless of their temperament, will be depressed by the Chasm's atmosphere, and really unstable ones may lose their cool completely, depending on the circumstances.

- **Dystopia:** As mentioned, technomagick is coincidental here, and all other styles are vulgar. Cybernetic foci reduce casting difficulties by an additional -1. Paradox often takes the form of electric shocks or "security alarms" summoning nearby police.

Strangers are not welcome here, by the way; all outsiders raise the difficulty of their Social rolls by +1.

The Digital Web links into Dystopia through a series of hidden "back doors." Characters can jump in here the same ways they access the Web (see above). Like the VR Zone, the Computer Net here exchanges a character's Mental Attributes for his Physical ones. Intelligence becomes Strength, Wits becomes Dexterity, and Willpower replaces Stamina. An experienced computer-type can change her appearance (her icon) in the Web by rolling Manipulation + Computers (difficulty 6) and spending a point of Quintessence or Gnosis.

- **Hy-Brasil:** Magick with "traditional" European foci (runes, wands, chants, etc.) reduce all casting difficulties by -1 (maximum -4). Magick without foci, or using "foreign" tools, is normal but coincidental. Matter, Life

and Forces work normally here, but Correspondence or Entropy-based Effects add +3 to their difficulty or backfire wildly. Time does not work at all, except to utterly disorient the caster. Paradox manifests as angry sprites who rip into the victim with tiny magic swords (physical backlash).

The residents of this Realm are fae, not spirits; they're material, essentially immortal, and vulnerable to cold iron. Changelings who visit here gain an additional two points of Glamour, but realize instinctively that this place has no real connection to Arcadia, much as the folk there would like to think that it does. These residents behave in capricious ways, as faeries often do. Manners are essential; rude people wind up in nasty traps, while visitors with a good grasp of etiquette gain favor. Don't take the gifts they offer, however; the old tales about eating and drinking in faerieland apply. Visitors who accept such tokens may find themselves unable to leave (Storyteller's option).

- **Mythic Worlds:** Everything about these myriad Realms is larger than life. All forms of magick are coincidental in most worlds. Technomagick is usually, but not always, the exception; a cyberpunk Realm will accept those foci as "normal" as well. Magick is never risk-free without risk—even a high-fantasy Realm will have nasty consequences for fouled spells—but a trip to the Mythic Realms offers a troupe a chance to cut loose and have some wild fun.

Although the Realms are really just spiritual representations of imagination, all Spheres work as they normally would; Life kills or heals the denizens of a Mythic Realm as it would on Earth, and Matter can bring down mountains. Time, however, works cockeyed. All Time Effect difficulties add +3 (maximum 10), and even successful spells have odd after-effects (blurry vision, speaking or hearing "out of speed," etc.). Paradox backlashes depend on the Realm; a Classical Greek Realm might invoke a thunderbolt from Zeus, while the OK Corral might conjure up a dust storm or an angry Indian spirit.

A character who joins a quest cannot leave the Realm, no matter what. Nor would he want to—the quest is an exciting thing, even if you're a mage or werewolf. Astral travelers who die during a quest go home, but those who wander in spirit form suffer a true death. Those who succeed gain a point of temporary Willpower and refresh any points they may have lost during the adventure. And these trips *are* adventures! They should be fast, exciting and filled with action.

- **The Radiance:** All magickal Effects add two dice to the caster's Arete roll, but often go way beyond the mage's intentions. A spell meant to grow wings, for example, might change the subject into a bird. All forms of magick are coincidental here, although Technomancers rarely find the place unless they have an experienced guide.

Prime is especially powerful in the Radiance: all Effects using that Sphere reduce their difficulties by -2. All mages absorb five points of Quintessence, which stay with them until it's used. Correspondence spells don't work at all, but

they give the caster a great head rush. Paradox "snaps" always take the form of searing bolts of energy (physical backlash), and can consume a wizard whole. Backlashes also add two dice to their effect!

A mage who ventures into the Pulse banishes all the points she had in her Paradox Pool at the time she entered. Once there, she can always gain more by screwing up, but whatever Paradox she had before she entered is purged by bathing in the heartbeat of the world.

Nothing and no one may be bound while in this Realm. Blood Bonds, spirit fetish-bonds, addictions, possessions and all forms of Mind control are snapped if the subject or master entets the Radiance. This freedom is permanent. Shapechangers who enter the Realm (including mages who shapeshift) change back and forth at random intervals between their various forms. The landscape changes as well (see description). A strong-willed individual can control those changes and remake the landscape to her will by spending a Willpower point (Gnosis for shapeshifters) and rolling Manipulation + Enigmas. The difficulty depends on the size of the change. Such alterations last only a few minutes, but can be made again later. A mage can even change herself as if she had Life 4 by spending a point of Quintessence and willing a change. This only lasts a minute or so, but can be very amusing.

- The Wasteland: Magick does not work here at all. Any attempt to use it backfires and make the situation even worse. Any group which enters the Wasteland is scattered; each person must face his torments alone. Once a scene is played out, the visitor is free to leave, or might be swept into another atrocity exhibition. At the fringes of the Realm, all travelers may be reunited. Given the harsh lessons of the Realm, they'll need the company.

Most of the Realm's "residents" are spiritual reflections, not actual people or even spirits. You can kill them, but they come back to life. If one of them "kills" a character in return, she'll fall out of the Realm and end up back on the Moon Paths. Visitors — like the Banes who occasionally come here to feed on the sheer misery of the Wasteland — are an exception; they're as solid as anyone else, and may be injured physically if the character has the power to do so. The Realm's defeat-laden atmosphere may, at Storyteller's option, drain a point or two of temporary Willpower from mortal visitors.

Chapter Three

- General Notes: Each of these Realms is a world unto itself. The means of traveling or navigating through them can be found at the beginning of this Appendix. Detailed treatments of the worlds of Wraith and Changeling are beyond the scope of this book; those Realms are a mystery to most mages, anyway. Troupes who wish to incorporate the Underworld and Near Dreaming into their chronicles should consult the other games' rulebooks for details.

The Realms

- The Low Umbra: All forms of magick are considered coincidental in the Underworld, but Arete rolls are at +2 difficulty. Life and Prime spells are always vulgar; Matter And Forces do not work at all. Large Effects can rip open Nihilis, gateways to the Tempest, The Tempest itself disrupts all Correspondence and Time-related spells, making them useless. Entropy magick is a hazy idea here. It flows easily (-2 difficulty), but unlocks the Shadow which lies at most ghosts' hearts. Once freed, these Shadows attack everyone in the vicinity. Only Mind and Spirit function with any real accuracy, and they're still hard to use.

Paradox backlashes summon hordes of screaming spectres (like Paradox spirits), which carry an unlucky mage into the heart of the Labyrinth; there, he undergoes a Harrowing, a group torture where the character confronts his worst fears. In game terms, the troupe usually shifts roles to become the tormenting Spectres, who in turn become the character's fears. See Wraith: The Oblivion's second edition rulebook for details. If you don't have that book, assume the mage has entered a Paradox Realm in hell (see Chapter One). He can't leave until he faces a gauntlet of emotional tortures he cannot escape. It's said the Nephandi consider Harrowings a cross between Sunday school and entertainment.

- The Maya: These Realms work best without firm rules. If you need systems, assume that magickal styles can be either vulgar or coincidental (depending on the dream), Mind and Spirit magick work at -2 difficulty, and Time-related Effects boot you out of the dream.

Changelings know the Dreaming best; their enchantment allows other folks to see the chimerical reality they dwell in. (see Changeling: The Dreaming and Nobles: The Shining Host for details about the fae and their world.) Astral visitors use their Mental Attributes instead of Physical ones. Creatures here seem as material as anything else; dream spirits are ephemeral, but should be considered Materialized when they meet characters in the Maya.

Dying in a Dream Realm catapults the traveler into an Earthbound coma. In game terms, this resembles a Quiet mindscape (Mage, page 179), usually for a few weeks. If he perishes in a particularly horrible way, he may have to make a Willpower roll or die for real. Entering another person's dream is easy — a simple Mind 3 trance gets you in. Getting out is more difficult, and typically demands a resisted Willpower roll, with the dreamer having a lower difficulty than the trespasser (often 2 less). A character who meets one of the Oneira makes a disturbing discovery: Within their own Realms, these beings are gods. If a visitor displeases Myathia of the Twelve Collars, for example, that visitor may awaken mute, or forever cold, or speaking backwards (the punishments dealt out by Neil Gaiman's Morpheus can give you the general idea). In other words, travelers should behave!

- Paradox Realms: The Sphere or Spheres that bring a mage to a Paradox Realm are vulgar inside that Realm. Any magickal failure or botch compounds the punishment. It's usually best to avoid using magick *at all* once you're in a Paradox Realm. The only way to escape is to confront some test or obstacle and overcome it without using mystick power. Those who struggle mire themselves further in, leading to situations like Rugnir's Crib,

- The Hollow World: All forms of magick are coincidental in the Hollow World, much to the delight of the few Technomancers who find the place. No magickal complications are necessary. Sample listings of common dinosaurs can be found in Chapter Six. The existence of the dero and tero is left completely to the Storyteller. White Wolf refuses to confirm or deny such rumors.

Chapter Four

- General Notes: Creating a Horizon Realm requires a massive ritual involving the following elements: a linked network of Nodes; Matter 4, Forces 4, Prime 4 and Spirit 4; and months or years of work. Guidelines must be established, Nodes found, ley lines created, mighty spells crafted, precautions taken, and efforts coordinated. A glitch at any portion of the process may have disastrous consequences.

Once the process is completed, a pocket in reality is formed. Inside, the work begins on the shaping and structuring of the Realm. Here's where the great difference between an Umbral Realm and a Horizon Realm — the first occurs naturally, the second, deliberately — becomes obvious. Anyone who wants to construct a Horizon Realm had better have access to lots of money, materials, magick and time. The Book of Chantries and Horizon: The Stronghold of Hope present some of the larger Horizon Realms in the modern world; Chapter Four of the first book runs down many of the details (some of them now out-of-date ruleswise, but otherwise helpful) of Realm construction, politics and ecology.

It's worth noting that spirit-summoning and Gauntlet-piercing Effects tend not to work well in most Horizon Realms because, quite simply, the spirits are out in plain sight. Realms which have spirits, like the Dreamspeaker Lodge of the Gray Squirrel, have no Gauntlet between the worlds; those which don't, like Autocthonía, have no spirits around to affect (except The Computer and the Geomids, both of which are pretty distant from the hallways of the Realm). In short, most Spirit-magick Effects are worthless in Horizon Realms, unless they either pierce the pericarp or allow a mage to summon or see a spirit out in plain sight,

The Realms

- Autocthonía: As you can guess, anything except for technomagick is considered vulgar with witnesses in Technomancer Heaven. Entropy Effects are at +3 difficulty, and failed attempts set off alarms all over the area.

The Spirit Sphere is completely useless except in the Central Core, although its Dimensional Science variant (see Technocracy: Void Engineers) works normally.

Paradox causes an especially vicious backlash here: Offending mages either slide into Quiet and have their bodies gathered up for fuel or forced labor, or take physical damage such as choking, followed by disintegration. Each turn, the mystick suffers one Health Level of aggravated damage (no soak); if he reaches zero Health, his body begins to scatter. His molecules float away and become integrated into Autocthonía's structure. Other reality deviants, such as vampires and werebeasts, suffer minor pains, which grow worse the longer they remain. Changelings discover an agonising place with an effective Banality of 10, and ghosts find the Shroud just as impenetrable. Thus is the Pattern maintained.

Surveillance cameras, monitors and bugs are everywhere. Turning invisible may handle the cameras, and silence may deter the bugs, but few preparations can elude the motion sensors, laser grids, thermal monitors, probability counters, temporal shields, brainwave readers and lifeform scanners. Treat these systems as all-Sphere sensory Effects plus mundane sight, touch and hearing perceptions, with a Dice Pool of 8. Foiling them requires someone with Computers, Computer Hacking, Technology, or at least Misdirection.

Hacking difficulties aimed at disabling Autocthonía's computer systems require at least 10 successes at difficulty 10 for a localized shutdown. A total shutdown is virtually impossible. No Earthbound computer systems link Autocthonía with the planet, although a system of complex relay stations exists within the Digital Web for transferring information. This creates an inefficient lagtime, but avoids security risks. Information often takes one to 10 minutes to transfer from Earth to Autocthonía, far longer if the transmission is from someone other than an Iteration X Comptroller. A patrol of machine-spirits (ironically enough) and Void Engines defend the Construct's exterior from invaders, and an advanced obfuscation shield (no relation to the vampiric Discipline) deflects radio signals and mundane satellite photos. The interior bulkheads can withstand eight Health Levels worth of damage before rupturing, and the exterior walls can take a great deal more.

Failures and botches while breaching any of Autocthonía's security measures alert The Computer, which can discern the offenders' location with a successful Perception + Technology roll (eight dice; difficulties range from 4 to 9, depending on how skilled the trespasser is and how badly he blew his own roll). A squad of 10 HIT Mark Vs will be dispatched to the intruders' location immediately. The Computer is nothing if not precise.

- Balador: All forms of technomagick are strictly vulgar outside Stim City; most forms of magick are vulgar, for that matter, save those which tap into the primal passions or mental disciplines. The Cultists are pretty exclusive, and don't want any tight-assed Hermetics or Celestials messing up their Realm. Paradox takes the form of Quiet in almost every case.

- **Darkside Moonbase:** All forms of magick except the Technocracy's preferred methods are vulgar on the dark and lifeless aspect of the Moon. Even Technocracy procedures add +1 to all their difficulties, and occasional "disruption storms" (read: Luna getting pissed) raise that difficulty even more, Paradox usually results in equipment failure; that, in turn, is usually fatal.

Ether-breathing doesn't work well on the Technocracy's Moon; those travelers who try to do it find themselves gasping for air within a minute or so. Occasional werewolf or faeries step through the Moon's Gauntlet when they can (ar difficulty 10, that's pretty rare; see notes for Chapter Five), but they don't hang around for long. Darkside Icarus is quite haunted; the Shroud here drops to 8 under most circumstances. During the "disruption storms," it falls to 5. Most smart Void Engineers avoid the ruins during those "days."

Despite all the problems, Darkside Base is well-equipped with advanced gear. Technocracy: Void Engineers, Chapter Three, offers an overview of common toys, as well as details about the space marines and technicians. Even so, morale here is perilously low, and "off-the-record" violence is pretty high. Most Engineers stationed here would do a lot to get another post somewhere, *anywhere* else....

- **The Copernicus Research Center:** Anything goes in a "Realm" this big. Use your imagination. Strict technomagick is the rule in the living complexes, but outside, the rules are as flexible as you, the Storyteller, want to make them. (See the "Travel Beyond the Horizon" section earlier in this Appendix for some guidelines.)

- **The Gernsback Continuum:** Eccentric technomagick is the rule here; all forms of mystick magick or Technocracy-style hair-splitting are *vulgar*, my dear chap, vulgar. The emphasis of the Realm is on wonder and excitement, and the parameters of its reality support that, Paradox, when it occurs, usually takes the form of a) a nasty malfunction, like an explosion or ninaway, or b) a sudden bolt of Tesla-esque lightning, probably thrown from a nearby coil tower designed for defense purposes (can't have nasty mages running around loose, now can we?) Consider either form a physical backlash and be done with it.

- **Midrealm:** A Realm of archetypal symbols incarnate, Midrealm allows nothing but the most primitive magick styles, Paradox consists of Typhon and the Protean Hawk, which hunt anyone who disturbs their home's integrity.

The Alder Bole's roots and branches can be considered parts of the Null Zone; they may in fact *be* the Null Zone in another aspect. Any place those corridors can reach is accessible through the trees and roots, although a traveler who climbs the Bole must hang on tight (Dexterity + Athletics or Climbing, often difficulty 7). Those who fall from the Bole might land anywhere in the Tellurian, from Earth to a Dream Realm,

The Fruits of Eternity, the Sisters and Forethought are best left to your own discretion. These powers are immortal

and archetypal, and thus defy simple rules. Suggested "rewards" for those who eat the Fruits include full healing, new points of Willpower, deep sickness, madness, or even immortality (freedom from age and disease, at any rate), depending on the players, the chronicle and the story's needs. Those who would take Forethought's place of suffering must ask themselves "Do I really want to lose my character this way?"

- **Victoria Station:** As with the Gernsback Continuum, the rules of the Station belong to eccentric technomagick, Paradox, however, is not as much of a problem here. Instead, mages who screw up end up in Quiet, often for some time. Thea has a room set aside for such victims to recover in, as the Realm's own residents fall into that state quite frequently.

Victoria Station is renowned for mysterious benefactors who help do the work when nobody's looking. In game terms, anytime a character begins a non-magickal task and leaves it overnight, it's possible that some of the work will be done for him when he returns. The Storyteller should roll once for the invisible helpers; the difficulty depends on whether or not the visitor has been respectful or amusing. If so, the difficulty is 6; if not, it's 9. For problems that involve Technology, Science, Computer, Faerie Lore or any other artistic or craft skill, roll six dice. For all other tasks, roll three dice. Unless the faeries finish the job or botch it, the person can pick up where the "help" left off when he returns.

Victoria Station's best defense is its virtual invisibility; planted as it is in orbit around the Umbral "dying moon" aspect of Luna (see Chapter Five), the Sons of Ether never see the Void Engineers, and vice versa. Some of those entities which call the Moon home have recognized the Station, but by now they understand that the Scientists wouldn't do anything too wrong, so they leave them alone. Odd pockets of reality-shift (like the one that brought a sentient dinosaur to the Realm) occasionally flutter around the Chantry, disguising it even further. Is this some legacy of Arcadia, or just Luna and Phoebe playing tricks? Only the Umbrood know for sure....

- **Verbena Seasonal Realms:** As Autochthonia is to primal magick, so the Seasonal Realms are to technomagick. Paradox strikes as bolts of lightning, ice storms, swarms of insects, and other forms of physical backlash. Visitors who despoil the Realms, magickally or otherwise, find themselves plagued by runs of bad luck. Animals become hostile, tempests spring up out of nowhere, diseases strike, and the Realm's guardians, often ancient and powerful Verbena witches, seem to materialize from the very trees themselves....

Life magick is the Realm's essence; all Effects using this Sphere reduce their difficulties by -2, and some spells may be considered automatically successful if the mage has a Dice Pool that adds up to more than the difficulty number. Autumn Circle is a strange exception: This Realm is so hungry for blood that wounds will not mend without Life 2

or 3 healings. The harsh weather around Winter Castle requires either warm clothing or adjustments through Life magick; an unprotected traveler may need to make Stamina rolls every hour or so (difficulty 6 to 10, depending on the weather) or lose one Health Level per hour (no soak). Death, of course, is the flip side of life, and worldwalkers who venture to the Seasonal Realms should remember that.

Chapter Five

- **General Notes:** As a general rule, all magick is coincidental in space. The standard difficulty, therefore, is $\text{Arete} + 3$. Some Realms may differ.

Past the Horizon (which extends as far as Mars), there is no Paradox. Botched rolls, however, often cause the Effect to backfire. A bolt of fire may explode in the character's hand instead of in the target's face, a transformation may go horribly wrong, and a life-sustaining spell might end up draining the subject instead. Old Paradox Flaws often (but not always) fade when a mage crosses the Horizon.

Any space station is considered a Realm with the coincidental "edge" stacked in its founders' favor. A group of Void Engineer marines who board a Son of Ether station may have the Devil's own time with Paradox, as their Effects will often be vulgar. This makes space warfare more difficult than it would appear. Common ground, like laser pistols, jet packs and power armor, are considered normal technology, and always work.

Assume that, on the planets and Shade Realms, all Effects which use that Realm's Sphere reduce their difficulties by -2. Automatic success may apply with those Spheres alone.

The Realms

- **Venus/S.R. Life:** Venus has a Gauntlet of 10, and the difficulty is the same everywhere on its surface. Explorers need Life 2 magicks (or equivalent equipment) to be safe in the Venusian Penumbra. Life 1 is sufficient to get by, but for every week the character is exposed to the raw marshes and jungles, he loses one die from all Dice Pools. Subtract the same for every two days that a completely unprotected human spends outside.

- **Mars/S.R. Forces:** Visitors need magicks or equipment of about Forces 2 to be safe, though short trips are possible with Forces 1 (which enables the explorer to see what's coining and dodge). Without any protection or detection devices, it's just a matter of time before a big shock wave or energy blast hits and destroys the mage,

- **The Moon/S.R. Prime:** The Gauntlet of the Moon is related to the amount of light it receives from the Sun. Inside large craters (particularly near the rims) the GaLimlet is 3. Outside the craters, in the tight (two Earth-weeks to a day, two Earth-weeks to a night), the Gauntlet is 5. In the dark, the Gauntlet is 7. For 10 or 20 miles around Darkside Moonbase, the Gauntlet is 10, Except, perhaps for the ruins of Darkside Icarus.

Despite all rumors, no link between Arcadia and the Moon exists. At least, not any longer. The Celestine manifestation, Phoebe, can be reached by travelers who pass through the Aetherian Reaches. Long ago, Luna conceded a bit of her essence to the obnoxious humans who insisted on setting up shop on the Moon. She put a false Penumbra aside for those who wanted to try out their pathetic magicks on the planet and drew her true form into the spirit world, where her favored shapeshifters can still visit her. Umbra: The Velvet Shadow contains more details about Phoebe's hidden face,

- **Jupiter/S.R. Matter:** Using the portal at the Eath's North Pole, no magick is necessary to enter S.R. Matter. If a character wished to go to the Hollow Jupiter or Mars, a polar portal would work the same way on those planets. At the Horizon gateway, an explorer needs Correspondence 4 to cross into the Hollow Earth, and theoretically this method could work going to the other Hollow Worlds.

- **Saturn/S.R. Time:** See listing; all Time magick is at -4 difficulty, and has double the normal effect, or more. The consequences of using it, though, are impossible to predict.

The war raging across these planets' moons involves nearly 300 mages from the various factions, and hundreds of censors, space marines, Bygones and horrific things. There are permanent portals between these stations and Darkside Moonbase, Victoria Station, the Gernsback Continuum, Null-B, MECHA and Doissetep. Just when the combatants think they have the other sides figured out, someone springs a new surprise. A really wild chronicle could be run around the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, but the details go beyond the scope of this book and may clash with the tone of many Mage chronicles. Good sources for such a game include Void Engineers, Sons of Ether, The Book of Madness and The Book of Chantries.

- **Uranus and Neptune/S.R. Spirit and Mind:** Travelers to these Realms need no special knowledge or equipment. Indeed, those who meditate into Seekings go there automatically, leaving their bodies behind (Mage, pages 31-32, 227-228).

When any kind of spirit crosses the threshold of the Realm, it takes on its true form (no disguise Charms work here) and a separate "body." This includes almost all Umbrood (Bygones, demons, whatever), mage's Avatars and nearly-Awakened Avatars.

Few other supernamrals frequent S.R. Spirit, but for crossover purposes, use the following rules: Vampires have no visible spirit. Garou have no separate spirit, but seem "doubled" when they visit (which is almost never; imagine *every* fetish-bound spirit in a medium-sized pack let loose at once). Wraiths become visible and can communicate and interact freely here. Changelings show their true seeming, but have no visible spirit.

Marauders, by the way, calm down in these Realms and become as sane as they can get (not very). Their landscape is determined by their madness — Miss Zhao, (for example)

whose delirium involves ancient China, would see ancient China. Other explorers passing through would also see things as Miss Zhao does.

- Space: See Introduction for rules about travel and Anchorheads.

Nephandi, Marauders and other wild things live in this Void. We leave the details about them to your chronicle, although *The Book of Madness*, *The Book of Chantries* and the *Book of the Wurm* offer many possibilities. *Sons of Ether*, *Void Engineers* and *Hidden Lore* offer a variety of Umbraships, and Chapter Six contains a few more.

A mysterious race, called the Ka Luon by the Traditions, continues to appear in *Void Engineer* and *Etherjammer* records, but no encounter with the "hidden ones" has yielded decisive information as of yet. The "Demon Hordes" in the Deep Umbra are better known by far. Some accounts claim they hail from Malfeas, while

others speculate they come from a galaxy whose explorers have not survived to share their discovery. Chapter Six offers a few samples of these horrors.

- Shenti: Gateways to the Shenti form and fade on their own accord. Storytellers can feel free to put them wherever they like. The *Wurm Reaches*, *Wyld Reaches* and *Weaver Reaches* of the *Aetherian Reaches* (Chapter Two, and *Umbra*, pages 36-37) can be said to be reflections of the Shenti, as the *Shade Realms* reflect the Shards.

The Shenti of Stasis, *Autochthonia*, can be found in Chapter Four. The detailed yet distant nature of the other Shenti, *Malfeas* and the *Flux*, are beyond the scope of this book. *Malfeas* is discussed in Chapter Three of *Book of the Wurm*, *Flux* in Chapter Two of *Umbra: The Velvet Shadow*. Assume that all magicks except *Entropy* are at +2 difficulty in *Malfeas*, and everything is coincidental. The *Flux* can have whatever game effects you want it to have, so long as they change constantly.



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